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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN POSTSECONDARY AND WORKFORCE READINESS  
IN A SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

---

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Keisha Kayon Morgan

August 2017

Advisor: Kristina Hesbol, Ph.D.

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Title: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN POSTSECONDARY AND WORKFORCE  
READINESS IN A SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY  
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Degree Date: August 2017

### **Abstract**

As the focus on graduating all students and preparing them for postsecondary pursuits increases, schools are examining their practices in supporting how students are successfully prepared (Gutmann, & Ben-Porath, 1987; Guilfoyle, 2013). This study examined how the diversity of the family structure that now permeates modern day society can be used as a true partnership that embraces inclusivity and as a credible component to the postsecondary pursuits of students. Through the lens of the existing literature and a new theoretical framework, The Model of Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (FEPWR), the researcher identified the intersections between family engagement and postsecondary and workforce readiness. The new framework constructs an approach that is more inclusive in language, that addresses educators at all levels, and that bridges the gap between all levels of schooling and into the workforce.

This research used a case study design. Through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document review, the results of the study revealed that families perceived their engagement as occurring all the time outside of the school context and in various forms. However, family engagement was perceived and defined differently by teachers, principals and other administrators. Additionally, the results revealed that while families may encounter barriers to being engaged in postsecondary and workforce readiness at the school level, they still had high aspirations for their children to be



successful regardless of age of children, ethnicity or socio-economic status. An element of surprise in the findings was that families had low regards for postsecondary and workforce readiness programming.

The study outlines the implications for schools and school districts if stakeholders do not begin to understand and value the multiple representations of family engagement. The study further presents recommendations for system leaders and practitioners to employ targeted policies and practices that recognize the myriad forms of family engagement as integral to supporting students' preparation for postsecondary pursuits.

*Keywords:* Family engagement, postsecondary and workforce readiness, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, family, families, engagement, stakeholder.

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## Chapter One

*I would like them to grow up to be thinkers and problem solvers and so everything we do from here on out, I cannot predict what the world is going to look from here on out for the majority of time, but I think if we got kids that can think critically, who can look at information, wait, form an opinion and feel like they have the right to defend that opinion, my hope is that they can handle whatever they need... Families are engaged in every way possible. Some families have more strategies than others... I cannot think of a single family in this building who does not want their kids to grow up to be loved, financially stable, part of a community. I think everybody wants their kids to be their version of successful.*

— Lisa

### Background – The Big Picture

A foundational tenet of the American fabric is that every student should have an education that will prepare them to compete in a global economy (Guilfoyle, 2013; Gutmann & Ben-Porath, 1987). President Barack Obama made this obvious in his advocacy to make education America's national mission (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Attempts have been made to remove achievement and opportunity gaps from American schools. The Obama administration, for example, pursued executive actions to

ensure that high school graduates are equipped for college, life, and work as one way to address these gaps. In order to understand these actions, a brief overview of the various initiatives will shed light on the goal to educate all children to prepare them for the global society.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, enacted in 2002, is an update to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (1965). However, the requirement of NCLB is considered by some to be dictatorial in nature, and it has progressively become difficult for schools and educators to administer (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). For example, NCLB places emphasis on which subjects it considers valuable and the kinds of assessments to be done (Hursh, 2007; Koretz, 2009). Subject areas such as Mathematics and Reading are given unprecedented focus (Guilfoyle, 2006). Literacy is redefined as reading and funds are restricted for the instruction of phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension (Hursh, 2007). Other content areas such as civics, physical education, history, art, and music, are not measured but have an impact on students' education (Guilfoyle, 2006). The NCLB Act aims to hold educational institutions and states accountable for the education of all children and this is a significant benefit to the education sector (Maleyko & Gawlik, 2011).

Even though NCLB held schools and states to more accountability and shed light on where students were making progress or needed additional support, the requirements were too prescriptive (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). As such, the Obama administration responded to the invitation from educators and families to improve the law with the goal of fully preparing all students for success in college and career (U.S.

Department of Education, 2015). Consequently, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) was a result of this call. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorizes the previous Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). ESEA reflected a commitment to equal opportunity for all students. However, ESSA, the new law, builds on key areas of progress made with the previous laws. More specifically, ESSA is designed to make advancement in increased graduation rates, decreased dropout rates, and more students entering college (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

A common strand in the goals of these legislative endorsements is the preparation of students for postsecondary education, and successful transition into society beyond the classroom. Family engagement is also a major focus where states, schools, and education authorities are encouraged to provide support to families in order to improve achievement (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002; Parent Involvement, 2002; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). This impact is even more evident in the expansion of ESSA and in the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kutner, 2013) created by the U.S. Department of Education with assistance from the Harvard Graduate School of Education (Mapp & Kutner, 2013).

Notably, Colorado is committed to all students becoming educated and productive citizens capable of succeeding in society, the workforce, and life (“About the Colorado Department of Education,” n.d.). Colorado legislature has endeavored to align the PreK-12 system with higher education with the ultimate goal of impacting postsecondary and workforce readiness (PWR) (Lefly, 2011). As such, Colorado Senate Bill 08-212, also

called the Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K) (S.08-212, 2008), passed in 2008, and focused on more rigor in academic standards for postsecondary and workforce readiness as early as preschool and continuing through high school (Lefly, 2011). Under CAP4K, the new assessment system incorporated formative and interim assessments, school readiness definition and a common definition of postsecondary and workforce readiness (Colorado Department of Education, 2012). This Senate bill was a collaborative process between stakeholders from PreK-20, and military and business personnel.

Not only is there a focus on postsecondary and workforce readiness in Colorado, but the state is also making efforts to focus on partnership with families in education. The extent of this commitment is evident in the declaration by a Colorado governor who designated the month of October as “Family and School Partnership in Education Month.” The year 2016 marked the fifth year that October was designated to observe this initiative. The purpose of this special month is to share information with families and educators and provide support to ensure that every student is learning and prepared from preschool to postsecondary and the workforce (State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education, 2016).

Even though greater emphasis is placed on postsecondary and workforce readiness, many high school graduates continue to lack preparation adequate for postsecondary pursuits (ACT, 2014; Blueprint for Reform, 2010; Hull, 2012; Mazzeo, Fleischman, Heppen, & Jahangir, 2016). Both higher education institutions and employers agree that high school graduates are not prepared with basic skills for entry

level positions or college coursework (Hart, 2005; Mueller & Gozali-Lee, 2013). If this continues, states will not be able to produce the educated workforce that is needed to fill the 74% demand in jobs that is projected for 2020 (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2013).

This lack of preparation has historically and continues to impact traditionally underrepresented students at higher rates than their White peers (ACT, 2014; Greene & Forster, 2003; Kirst & Bracco, 2004; Mazzeo, Fleischman, Heppen, & Jahangir, 2016; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). For example, a report completed by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that minority students represent the largest number of students enrolled in remedial courses as of 2011-2012 (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Nationally, Hispanics represent 22.4% while Blacks represent 22.2% (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). This accounts for almost a 50% combined representation in Blacks and Hispanics taking remedial courses. In Colorado, Black and Hispanic students also represent higher numbers of students taking remedial courses in postsecondary education (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2016). Black students had the highest remedial placement rates with 82% of Blacks showing a lack of preparedness for college at two-year institutions, and 52.5% at four-year institutions (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2016). In addition, 39% of Hispanics took remedial courses at four-year institutions, and almost 70% at two-year institutions (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2016).

Schools, therefore, are beginning to focus on exposure to college long before high school to begin preparation for postsecondary pursuits. Elementary schools are taking the opportunity to develop a culture of being postsecondary and workforce ready, and are

engaging in the process of minimizing both the academic and opportunity gaps (Conley, 2014; Guilfoyle, 2013). For example, schools often highlight the college experiences of their teachers and name their classrooms after colleges so that they can amplify the focus on a college-going culture. Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) define college culture as an environment that is saturated with resources exposing students to the process of postsecondary education, and these resources are accessible to all students. In addition, there are ongoing informal and formal conversations about these pathways to college and career (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). An important aspect of this culture is social support that promotes positive and meaningful connections between students and school (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Gordon and Louis (2009) further suggest the creation of a culture where teachers sense that they are sharing the role of educating children with families. Schools and districts need to consider how they shape culture for continuous learning from home to school in a way that fosters and honors the contributions from families and educators uniformly.

Auerbach (2004) suggests that schools could start this process by reinforcing college aspirations in families, and by introducing the idea of planning for college from the beginning. This is still the exception rather than the norm. For example, a common misconception about Hispanic families living in poverty is that families do not have high aspirations for their children's education (Becerra, 2012; Gonzalez, 2012; Hill & Torres, 2010). Closer to the truth for this population is that education is a priority and they are engaged in their children's schooling (Becerra, 2012; Delgado Gaitan, 2012; Gonzalez, 2012; McWayne & Melzi, 2014). This is evident in the fact that families regret not

having information prior to 10<sup>th</sup> grade regarding college options and requirements (Auerbach, 2004). Another such instance is that families in the lower-income category feel ill-equipped to prepare their children for college, despite a strong desire to do so (Kirk, Lewis-Moss, Nilsen, & Colvin, 2011). Even families with no college-going experience, and families from other underrepresented populations want more information so they can help their children (Constantino, 2003; Hill & Torres, 2010; Tierney & Auerbach, 2004). So then, there is a growing need to raise academic expectations and foster a postsecondary and workforce readiness culture in schools and school districts for all students.

Because families have early aspirations for their children, and strong home-school relationships matter, then family engagement needs to be developed that also targets elevating the expectations and commitment of the various stakeholders involved in the educational process (Froiland, Peterson & Davison, 2013; Weiss, Caspe & Lopez, 2006). Family expectations have sustained effects on children as early as the elementary level (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). According to Lawrence (2015), “Parents may raise their expectations because they are conforming to a higher expectational norm or because they perceive relative advantages for their children due to the characteristics of other students or the school” (p. 205). Therefore, they can have a positive impact on academic achievement by preserving a strong hope that their children will flourish in their postsecondary endeavors (Froiland et al., 2013). Families play a key role in students’ levels of preparation for PWR pathways. The extent to which this perception is understood in school districts is questionable.

In order to continue the quest of preparing students for post-secondary education and workforce readiness, investing in families as resources could have a ripple effect in education, especially for marginalized and underrepresented communities (Auerbach, 2004; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Research has long confirmed a relationship between family engagement, student achievement, school readiness and graduation rates (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, Egeland, & Harris, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009). Similarly, it is important to promote sustained family engagement in PWR in the primary through young adult years of students (Reynolds & Shlafer, 2010).

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is widely researched that family engagement has sustaining effects on student achievement. However, differing perceptions exist on what family engagement looks like. Even further, there is little available research on family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in school districts. As such, school districts need to explore and develop a culture around family engagement that is inclusive, and that is targeted towards postsecondary and workforce readiness. If school districts do not gear their practices towards a more systemic and process-oriented definition of family engagement in PWR, it is unlikely that it will have sustaining attitudes from stakeholders and deficit perceptions will persist (Hecht & Shin, 2015) towards family engagement in PWR. Schools and school districts will also continue to experience decreased



postsecondary aspirations and expectations among students which further widens the opportunity gap.

### **Research Question**

As the purpose of this research was to examine family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness, the key question that was discussed in this study is, “What are the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in a suburban school district?”

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study research was to explore the perceptions held by various stakeholders regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in a suburban school district. It was an attempt to learn more, and understand each stakeholder’s potential to impact PWR as part of a collaborative partnership. By embarking on this exploration, the researcher identified challenges and opportunities for the varying types of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in the school district. By using a case study design, and through the use of interviews, document review, and observations, the researcher gained insight on the perceptions and the roles of teachers, administrators, and families in both shaping and sustaining an increased postsecondary and workforce readiness partnership. In order to establish a cooperative relationship between families, teachers, principals, administrators, and other stakeholders, the perceptions of family engagement from these various stakeholders were considered.

## **Significance of the Study**

There is a wealth of research in the area of family engagement, and likewise in postsecondary and workforce readiness—the latter being mostly referred to as college and career readiness—but the two are rarely merged. While the literature is clear that family engagement positively impacts school readiness, student achievement, and graduation rates (Englund et al., 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Weiss et al., 2009), it does not explicitly point to the specific skills defined in PWR. As such, researchers and educational organizations have encouraged more focus on family engagement as an essential component in PWR (Kiyama, Harper, Ramos, Aguayo, Page & Riester, 2015; Weiss, Lopez & Rosenberg, 2010). Other researchers have encouraged further research on the perceptions of parents on family engagement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This study identifies the intersection between the two areas of family engagement and PWR. Cohen, Linker and Stutts (2006) document that it would be beneficial to have a collaboration that involves the different stakeholders at various levels in the school system, and that this collaboration should include families.

Much of the literature is also focused on teachers' and parents' perceptions of family engagement. The literature, therefore, lacks a complete overview of perceptions of the various stakeholders across the school district. This study is significant in that it highlights the opportunity school districts have to develop partnerships leading to a culture of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness by examining and valuing the perceptions of various stakeholders. By exploring the perceptions of both

families and various stakeholders in a school district, families and educators can begin collaborating to prepare students for PWR. This study, therefore, fills a gap in the literature. The study also develops knowledge on family engagement in PWR and provides an advanced methodology and framework for evaluating family engagement in the school district.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Career and technical education (CTE).** This refers to the educational programs that specialize in skilled trades, applied sciences, modern technologies, and career preparation. Students of all ages are provided with the academic and technical skills, knowledge and training that will help them to succeed in future careers that are in-demand, as well as postsecondary education.

**College and career readiness.** Conley (2010) refers to college and career readiness as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and be successful in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution without needing remediation. He adds that it is also the level of preparation needed that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential for future advancement.

**Cultural diversity.** This refers to the existence of a variety of ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, undocumented and immigrant families, single-parents, and same-sex families present in the schools, and extends to the social and familial construction of the home.

**Family.** In the context of this study, family refers to members beyond immediate parents who are considered the adult caregivers and advocates of the students in the

school district. These persons may or may not include grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, foster care providers, same-sex families and other constructs. This extensive interpretation of family will be further explained in the literature review in Chapter Two. Throughout the study, family or families will be used in place of parent or parents, but will honor the terminology used in research studies for the literature review.

**Family engagement.** According to Weiss et al. (2010), “Family engagement is a shared responsibility of family, schools, and communities for student learning and achievement; it is continuous from birth to young adulthood; and it occurs across multiple settings where children learn” (p 3). An understanding of family engagement in this context recognizes that all families—regardless of income or socio-economic status, education, and or cultural backgrounds—are involved in the learning process of their children and do desire for their children to succeed (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). This broader perspective of family engagement will be used as the operational definition and understanding throughout the study.

**Funds of knowledge.** Building on the work of Eric Wolf (1966), funds of knowledge was first defined from an anthropological perspective by Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg (1992). The term refers to the strategic and cultural resources which households contain (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). Moll, Amanti, Neff & González (1992) also defined funds of knowledge as the resources, knowledge, and skills that are essential for households or individual functioning and well-being. A more recent explanation of the term is provided by Sloan & Cortes (2013):

The belief that people are competent and have various levels of knowledge (skills, abilities, ideas, and practices), which they have historically developed and gained

through their lived experiences. It is the bodies of knowledge that underlie the activities of students' households and communities. Students' household members develop social networks that interconnect with other households in the community. It is these relationships that contribute to the various kinds of funds of knowledge that students possess and bring to the classroom (Sloan & Cortes, 2013, p. 928-929).

The pedagogical paradigm of funds of knowledge is a transformative practice in education where educators are able to connect home and school (González, Moll, Floyd-Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, Gonzales & Amanti, 1993). The participants (families, teachers, students, researchers) are co-learners and co-constructors of knowledge.

**P-20.** This is a system that integrates students' education beginning in preschool through a graduate school degree or the workforce.

**Parental involvement.** Much of the literature mentions parental involvement and so the terminology will be cited at times throughout the study. However, the study will advocate for a broader context and will promote the use of the term "family engagement" rather than "parental involvement," as parental involvement typically connotes the immediate relation of mother and father.

It is important to understand the definition of parental involvement based on the literature to establish the difference in terminology for "family engagement" and "parental involvement." According to a meta-analysis conducted by Jeynes, (2005), parental involvement is the "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (p. 245). Another meta-analysis of 50 studies conducted by Hill and Tyson (2009) involved literature on parental involvement published from 1985 to 2006. This study concluded that academic parental involvement was defined in three categories. The first was home-based involvement where parents assisted with

homework, provided educational toys, books, and took the children to educational facilities such as libraries and museums. The second definition was school-based where parents participated in parent teacher conferences, the Parent Teacher Association meetings, fundraising events, volunteering, and interacting with school staff. The final definition was academic socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Academic socialization involved the nurturing of educational aspirations for their children and helping their children to develop plans for the future (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

**Partnerships.** Partnerships will be defined as a relationship that exists where student achievement is a shared responsibility. These are relationships of trust and respect established between home and school, where families, and school as well as district staff, see each other as equal partners in the process (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding & Walberg, 2005).

**Postsecondary.** Postsecondary refers to any setting in which an individual pursues additional instruction beyond high school. This extends to two-year or four-year degree programs, certification programs, licensure programs, apprenticeships, or training programs in the military (Conley, 2012).

**Postsecondary and workforce readiness.** The Colorado State Board of Education and the Colorado Department of Higher Education jointly adopted a description of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness in 2009. According to statute, the definition should be reviewed every six years and both bodies need to agree on the definition. The most recent definition was adopted winter 2016. It states that postsecondary and workforce readiness indicates that “Colorado high school graduates

demonstrate the knowledge and skills (competencies) needed to succeed in postsecondary settings and to advance in career pathways as lifelong learners and contributing citizens” (Colorado Department of Education & Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2016).

Accordingly, these skills are:

- (1) Entrepreneurial - critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, inquiry and analysis, and informed risk taking.
- (2) Personal - initiative and self-direction, personal responsibility and self-management, adaptability and flexibility, self-awareness of learning preferences, strengths, and areas for growth.
- (3) Civic - core academic foundation, collaboration and teamwork, communication, global and cultural awareness.
- (4) Professional - time and work management, career literacy, grit and resilience, work ethic, dependable and reliable.
- (5) Academic - apply skills and knowledge, critical thinking and problem solving, inquiry, analysis, and evaluation, discernment (Colorado Department of Education & Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2016).

As previously stated, the term postsecondary and workforce readiness is more commonly referred to as college and career readiness in the literature. The former terminology is being adopted by states and institutions to be inclusive of all postsecondary options such as certificate programs and not just college degrees. As such, and in aligning the study with the language applied in the school district, the term “postsecondary and workforce readiness” will be used throughout this study.

**School advisory committee (SAC).** The committee provides a forum for parents, teachers and community members to share information that pertains to the school and district, discuss issues, and promote parental and community participation in the school.

**School/district culture.** The term “culture” has many and varied definitions. For the purpose of this study as it relates to the school district, culture will be examined in terms of influence. The culture of a school or district consists of stable, underlying

meanings that shape values and beliefs and behavior over time (Deal & Peterson, 2009).

The culture that is constructed is composed of traditions and ceremonies that schools and districts hold to build community, which then reinforces their values (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Deal and Peterson (2009) contend that culture plays an important role in exemplary performance. An even more positive view is that culture can also be the ultimate form of capacity. It is a means which supports motivation and co-operation, shapes relationships and aspirations, and further guides successful choices at every level of the school and district (Hobby, 2004).

**Student achievement.** The academic performance of a student or group of students usually based on state testing.



## Chapter Two: Literature Review

*Pues pienso que después del de la maestra que les empieza a inculcar es muy... la siguiente... la siguiente parte importante, ¿no? La familia. En que ellos sientan el soporte y ayudarlos y irlos preparando para que ellos logren sus sueños y logren estudiar y ser alguien en la vida.*

—Carmen

### Introduction

This chapter serves to examine the existing literature around family engagement, and postsecondary and workforce readiness. The literature examines the broader lens of “family engagement” as opposed to “parent involvement,” and provides context for the different definitions of the terms. The review begins by breaking down the terms *parents* and *family*, and *involvement* and *engagement*. It then argues for a shift towards “family engagement.” The literature further looks at how schools and districts are experiencing a change in demographics and then examines the barriers that hinder school-family engagement. Positive influences for postsecondary pursuits, and fostering a school and school district culture which is focused on values then concludes the chapter.

### Parent Involvement or Family Engagement?

**The question of parent or family.** In the United States, ethnic minorities are increasing which has forced schools to grapple with multi-culturalism and language

diversity (Hill, 2006). This is even more evident with the realization that approximately one in four children under the age of nine is being raised by at least one immigrant family member in the United States (Fortuny, Hernandez & Chaudry, 2010). Therefore, as the fabric of the American society continues to diversify demographically, it is important to recognize that family members have also expanded beyond the traditional nuclear family of mother, father and child/children. One example can be seen in the Latino culture where family consists of extended family members that are integral to the social and cultural contributions in the home (Falicov, 2014). By just saying *parents*, the terminology limits who is seen as being engaged in the educational process (Kiyama et al., 2015). The word *family*, on the other hand, conveys that the people who influence and support students on a regular basis in the home configuration are being honored. In addition, the term *family* acknowledges that others beyond the immediate relation of mother or father bear some responsibility for the upbringing of students (Bogensneider, Little, Ooms, Benning, Cadigan, & Corbett, 2012; Constantino, 2003; Moles & Fege, 2011). Keyser (2006) observed that word choice creates accessible communication, for example using the word *family* instead of *parents* will give a welcoming message to the larger family of the child. On the other hand, Constantino (2003) acknowledges the preference for *family*, but makes the decision to use *family* and *parents* interchangeably, a restriction that prevents further inclusivity.

Unfortunately, many school districts still operate from a deficit paradigm that limits and narrowly defines the role of families even if they have engaged in shifting the language from *parents* to *family* (Mapp & Hong, 2010). Lawson (2003) recognized the

limitation of the language especially in low-income, ethnically concentrated schools where the terminology operationalized educators' perspective in a school-centric framework (Lawson, 2003). By operating under the characterization of *family*, schools and school districts will be more culturally responsive as they acknowledge the multi-cultural communities in which they exist.

**The question of involvement or engagement.** The terms *involvement* and *engagement* also present similar challenges. According to Ferlazzo (2011), *involvement* implies “doing to” whereas *engagement* indicates “doing with.” When schools are focused on *involvement*, the support pattern typically strengthens and assist school programs and priorities (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). Therefore, schools and districts who strive for *involvement* have a conventional and programmatic approach. This programmatic approach is more structural in that it demonstrates activities in which parents provide support for their children’s education (Delgado Gaitan, 2012; Sheridan & Kim, 2015). Such programs and structures are typically disconnected from instructional practice; they disregard the way parents interact with their children in other settings besides school, and so, they become bystanders in the educational process (Sheridan & Kim, 2015; Weiss et al., 2010). Inherent in this basic level of *involvement* is that the parents are regarded primarily as consumers of education (Tolan & Woo, 2010). As a result, these environments become more prescriptive as they tell families how they can contribute (Ferlazzo, 2011), rather than as partners where their strengths and capacity are not overlooked in positively impacting student outcomes (Weiss et al., 2010).

*Engagement*, on the other hand, presents a different focus where families are seen as collaborating in the process. These environments listen to what parents think, dream, and worry about with the goal being to gain partners rather than serve clients (Ferlazzo, 2011). The term *engagement* has, therefore, gained momentum as scholars seek an alternative to *involvement* to minimize a school-centric approach (Edwards & Kutaka, 2015).

McKenna and Millen (2013) also use the term *engagement* to describe the school and parent relationship where there is both parent voice and parent presence. Parent voice means that communication flows both ways and honors the parent's voice. Parent presence is honored when the ideas, thoughts, and opinions of the parents are heard and acted upon in a positive way (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Parents are seen as having intimate knowledge of their children and are able to provide valuable insights. Acknowledging their insights and expertise will ultimately respect them as part of the education of their children (LaRocque, 2013). Therefore, engaging parents means that schools and districts lead with the self-interests of the parents, and not institutional self-interest (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

**The shift to family engagement.** Most of the literature uses *involvement* and *engagement* interchangeably as well as *family* and *parents*. In addition, family engagement is extensively discussed with variations on the term such as parent involvement, parent engagement, and school-family partnerships. Nevertheless, there has been an attempt to change the language from parent involvement to family engagement for two reasons: (1) to recognize and honor various family members – aunts, uncles,

foster parents, same-sex families, undocumented families, independent students, and other individuals who support and advocate for children (Kiyama et al., 2015; Mapp & Hong, 2010); and (2) to encourage a more active participatory relationship with other stakeholders to promote student achievement (Mapp & Hong, 2010).

A brief summation of the definitions of *parent involvement* and *family engagement* allows us to see that a clear distinction is necessary, and also why there is an attempt to change the language. The definition provided in Chapter One states that parental involvement is the “parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children” (Jeynes, 2005, p. 245). The description is more extensive in a meta-analysis of 50 studies conducted by Hill and Tyson (2009) who examined the literature on parental involvement published from 1985 to 2006. The study concluded that academic parental involvement was defined in three categories. The first was home-based involvement where parents assisted with homework; the second definition was school-based where parents participated in events, volunteered and interacted with school staff; the final definition was academic socialization which involved the nurturing of educational aspirations for their children, and helping their children to develop plans for the future (Hill & Tyson, 2009). While it may be arguable that this definition is not only a matter of “doing to” since the definition incorporates the social and emotional participation of parents outside of the operational involvement in school activities, the phrase is still limiting and has a conventional focus on structure and programs.

*Family engagement*, on the other hand, “is a shared responsibility of family, schools, and communities for student learning and achievement; it is continuous from

birth to young adulthood; and it occurs across multiple settings where children learn” (Weiss et al., 2010, p. 3). In this regard, *family engagement* recognizes the fact that all families—regardless of income or socio-economic status, education, and or cultural backgrounds—are part of the learning process of their children, and do desire for their children to do well (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Okagaki & Bingham, 2010). *Family engagement* is more holistic and values a relationship that extends beyond the academic context to value social and cultural contributions. In addition, this relationship between children and their families continues well beyond K-12, and therefore the potential exists for continuous learning and impact on life goals and choices. This is especially so because children spend the majority of their time with family members more than any other social context (Reynolds & Shlafer, 2010).

From this succinct overview of *family engagement* and *parent involvement*, it can be observed that other individuals, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings may be responsible for the care of children in a myriad of ways. As such, the term *family engagement* is beginning to supplant *parent involvement* (Moles & Fege, 2011). While aspects of *family engagement* and *parent involvement* may overlap in their definition and activities, a clear distinction will help schools and districts make the paradigm shift that models a true partnership between families, schools, and school districts, and that embraces and honors all family members participating in the advocacy and support of their children (Epstein, 2010; Jackson, Martin & Stocklinksi, 2004). The term also serves as a lever in closing gaps or disparities that are based on race, class, and education

(Ishimaru, 2017). This research will, therefore, advocate for and use the term *family engagement*.

### **What is Happening in School Diversity?**

As scholars acknowledge that the landscape is changing in the home configuration and more inclusive terminologies are necessary, there must also be a recognition that schools and school districts are facing similar shifts. The population in public schools across the United States has shifted racially and ethnically, and reflect a change in demographic distributions (Kena et al., 2016). In 2013, only 50% of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools were White. This was a decrease from 28.4 million in 2003 to 25.2 million in 2013. It means that the other half of the student population in 2013 consisted of other races and ethnicities. Black students accounted for 16%, Hispanics 25%, Asian 5%, American Indian 1% and Two or More Races 3%. It is projected that by 2025, White students will make up 46% enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools (Kena et al., 2016).

This cultural diversity reflects varying ethnicities present in the learning environment, however, research has indicated that teachers in kindergarten through high school are relatively a homogenous group (Okagaki & Bingham, 2010). In 2012, a study completed by the U.S. Department of Education found that the vast majority of teachers are White. According to a more recent report, the U.S. Department of Education (2016) found that 86% of teachers are White. Representing the minority groups, 7% are Black, 8% are Hispanic, and 1.4% are Asian (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Studies have found that the homogeneity of school staff, coupled with the diversity of the student population, present different expectations in the role that families play, both from the teachers' and parents' perspectives (Delgado Gaitan, 2012; Okagaki & Bingham, 2010). Families across different ethnic, ancestral, immigrant or generational status, home language, and cultural and socioeconomic groups may vary in preferences and expectations for the way they are involved such as being home-based, school-based or community-based (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins & Closson, 2005; Jeynes, 2016; Okagaki & Bingham, 2010; Whitaker & Ice, 2010). In addition, they may also vary in how they are involved in the learning process such as expressing personal, familial, or cultural expectations, encouraging persistence, offering instructional support, providing a place to do homework, or modeling attitudes, skills and behaviors (De Gaetano, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker & Ice, 2010). Often times, minority groups and immigrant families bring a different style of engagement and commitment which is dissimilar to the American mainstream culture (Hill, 2006), and repeatedly their worldview and culture is ignored as these collide in the academic setting (González et al., 2005; Hill, 2010; Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Nevertheless, across the diverse groups, families see their role as important. They still believe that education is important, and possess a deep desire for their children to do well in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jacob & Lefgren, 2007; Murray et al., 2014; Okagaki & Bingham, 2010).

Schools and districts lack an understanding of the cultural diversity in which they are embedded and how family engagement, in its broadest definition, is a credible component in the academic life of children (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). An example can be



seen in the study by Nelson & Guerra (2014), where parents who remained in the classroom with young ones at the start of the school day were viewed as interfering by educators. On the contrary, parents viewed this act as showing care and support (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). According to Okagaki and Bingham (2010), “Parents’ cultural models of education and learning influences their beliefs and engagement in their child’s schooling” (p. 97), but educators have not comprehensively supported how these interact. Schools and districts must shift and expand their thinking by moving from the deficit paradigm of “parent involvement” to that of “family engagement.” In doing so, educational practices will become more inclusive, and honor the diversity that families bring to the educational setting. This approach will also commit to the understanding that family engagement is a shared responsibility and a shared partnership (Weiss et al., 2010). The consideration of diverse backgrounds and the commitment to a shared partnership will facilitate children’s education, and resultant preparation and opportunities in life (Okagaki & Bingham, 2010).

### **Barriers between Families and Educators to Engagement**

Now that there is an understanding of the cultural and diverse shift in the landscape for families, schools, and school districts, it is relevant to also identify the barriers between families and educators. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (1998) reported six barriers to parental involvement: (a) lack of parent education on school work, (b) cultural or socioeconomic differences, (c) language differences between parents and staff, (d) parents’ attitude about the school, (e) staff attitudes towards parents, and (f) concerns about safety in the area after school hours. In 2016, a

toolkit completed jointly with NCES shows the education system struggling with similar challenges to family engagement almost twenty years later. The barriers listed in the toolkit are:

- (1) Parents' (and other family members') previous negative experiences or interactions with schools (for example, parents did not do well in school or educators told parents only what they should do without acknowledging what they might already be doing)
- (2) Language and cultural barriers (for example, parents or their representatives believe they should defer to educators and not play an active role in education).
- (3) Limited professional development and training of educators in family and community engagement.
- (4) Educators' own cultural beliefs and attitudes (Garcia, Frunzi, Dean, Flores & Miller, 2016, p. 4).

From a study conducted by Brock & Edmunds (2010), parents' perspectives were obtained and they listed the following perceived barriers: (1) time and work schedule, (2) self-efficacy – parents felt that the teachers could do a better job teaching their children than they could, and (3) that children did not want any help. After examining the literature, another study conducted by Hornby & Lafaele (2011) indicated numerous barriers to parent involvement: parents' perceptions about how they perceive their role in their child's or children's education; their perception on the level of explicit or implicit invitation to be involved; parents' life context; class, ethnicity and gender; the age of the children; learning difficulties; gifts and talents; behavioral problems; attitudes; language; historical and demographic factors; and political and economic factors. Studies that focus on minority populations also point to similar barriers: poverty of time, lack of access, lack of financial resources, lack of awareness, low levels of parent agency, confidence

and competence, negative perceptions of educators (Becerra, 2012; Lawson & Lawson, 2012; Williams & Sánchez, 2011)

In spite of the numerous barriers that the literature concludes exist, there are similarities and overlaps, and the barriers have not deviated much from the ones listed in 1998 by the National Center for Education Statistics. As such, the barriers that relate to this study and that will be discussed in this chapter are: (1) life circumstances, (2) economic barriers, (3) lack of inclusiveness, (4) family perceptions, and (5) educators' perceptions.

**Life circumstances.** There are many situations that families face on a daily basis which impact their engagement in the educational process of their children. One such aspect is life in general which may present challenges for families as they are faced with the daily juggle to exist outside the educational process of their children. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) refer to this as life context and explain that life context pertains to the parents' perception regarding their knowledge and skill to help their children academically, as well having the time and energy to do so. For example, single parents and those with young children find it more difficult to be involved in schools because of their responsibilities (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parents who are unemployed face the additional burden of lack of financial resources, the use of a vehicle, or the inability to pay for childcare fees (Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Nelson & Guerra, 2014). In light of these circumstances, rather than finding the resources to attend a school event, parents would opt for their children's basic needs to be met, such as transportation to school (Williams & Sánchez, 2011).

Parents who work may not have the ability to take time off work to attend meetings at the prescribed times issued by schools. The qualitative studies by Williams & Sánchez (2011) and Murray et al. (2014) found that parents considered employment as one of the major reasons that prevented them from being more involved in their children's education. The studies supported the fact that school events and hours of operation were not sensitive to the time that parents work, or that they even have multiple jobs (Murray et al., 2014; William & Sánchez, 2011). Though families encounter these life circumstances, the issues stem from the systemic barriers that schools and school districts perpetuate in the structures they implement and the expectations placed on families to be engaged within these parameters. This struggle is even more present as the shift in the family structure now accounts for matriarchal figures balancing life, work, and family.

Other life context issues that may be barriers to family engagement are the mental health of family members, poor physical health, and other disabilities (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007; Williams & Sánchez, 2011). If school buildings and classrooms are not equipped to provide easy maneuvering for disabled parents, this creates a lack of access and therefore becomes a barrier to parent involvement (Williams & Sánchez, 2011). A lack of access further speaks to whether or not the school climate is a welcoming environment (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007).

**Economic barriers.** Economic barriers related to class and socioeconomic status (SES) are also evident in the research. Higher socioeconomic and White middle-class

parents have the resources that enable them to advocate and seek advantages for their children, and typically show a higher level of engagement (Englund et al., 2004; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). By extension, parental involvement practices in schools often create pathways of access for the White middle-class (Baquedano-López, Alexander & Hernandez, 2013). Minorities, working class, and lower class parents, on the other hand, are less involved, less represented, less informed, have less access to resources and in general, experience more challenges (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Minke & Anderson, 2005; Trotman, 2001; William & Sánchez, 2011). Tierney (2001) suggests that schools need to consider how they plan for parental involvement that especially focuses on inclusive practices for low SES families.

In addition, parents who possess the cultural capital which matches that which schools perceive as valued, are often regarded as having higher engagement. Even though families in lower socioeconomic status still have their own cultural capital, it is unrecognized, and these families have substantially different relationships with teachers, school counselors and other educators (Delgado Gaitan, 2012; Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba & Henderson, 2013; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lawson & Lawson, 2012). In spite of the fact that ethnic, migrant, and undocumented populations are increasing in the United States, school leaders and other stakeholders are challenged in leveraging the available cultural capital, and funds of knowledge in a way that supports parents' efforts (Lawson & Lawson, 2012). These populations typically face hardships that threaten their educational progress (Lawson & Lawson, 2012).

**Lack of inclusiveness.** In a three-year longitudinal study, De Gaetano (2007) found that Latino parents were more likely to be engaged in schools and schooling if there was an emphasis on, and understanding of ethnicity, culture, and language. According to the study, families became more integrated into schools when their ethnicity, culture, and language were respected and valued (De Gaetano, 2007). For example, when interactions with families are conducted in their own language. O'Donnell and Kirkner (2014) also had similar findings. An example of this lack of understanding can be seen in cases where Latinos might be willing to attend parent-teacher conferences or engage in some level at the school. However, meetings are not conducted in Spanish, or information is not supplemented in Spanish, which in turn deters further involvement (Becerra, 2012; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Hill & Torres, 2010; McWayne, Melzi, Limlingan & Schick, 2016). It is even more difficult for English Language Learners (ELL) who are not Spanish speakers to have schools tailor services to meet their needs (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). There are fewer students in the school who may speak that particular language so there are fewer support services or none at all for this group of ELL students (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

The lives of families are deeply shaped by many cultural facets be it life events, race, class, language, and/or migrant inequality, but schools neglect to acknowledge or understand these dynamics, and by virtue continue to embrace deficit approaches which are not culturally responsive (Baquedano-López, 2013; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Being aware of the numerous cultural barriers between educators and families is a way to leverage the strengths of parental engagement needed for the success of students (Leiber-

Miller; 2012; McWayne, Melzi, Limlingan & Schick, 2016). This knowledge will enrich the ability of educators to incorporate culturally different approaches in their schools and school districts (Delgado Gaitan, 2012).

**Family perceptions.** The fourth barrier to family engagement is family perceptions. The literature identifies various perceptions that family members possess that create barriers to engagement in their children's academic growth, development, and pursuits. One such perception is self-efficacy and doubt in their own ability to help their children. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) describe self-efficacy as parents' belief that they are capable of helping their children in school. Parents are less likely to engage with schools as they worry that their lack of self-efficacy would not have a positive impact on their children (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010). Parents of lower socioeconomic status experience this lack of self-efficacy which becomes a barrier to involvement (Murray et al., 2014). For some parents, this lack of confidence may be as a result of less education, or language differences, while for others, they may have negative experiences with previous schools, or even their own schooling (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). In contrast, Murray et al. (2014) found that even in the face of negative experiences, parents expressed little reticence with interacting with school teachers and staff. They still wanted to be involved in the education of their children. This finding contrasted with Kim (2009), Koonce & Harper (2005), and Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) who found that parents' lack of confidence with interacting with teachers, as well as perceived racism were barriers to involvement.

Lack of self-efficacy is especially evident when parent's view their level of education as inferior to teachers who they believe are more educated, which results in low involvement with teachers (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Kim, 2009; Koonce & Harper, 2005; Leiber-Miller, 2012). Another layer to this lack of self-efficacy occurs as children continue on to the secondary level of education; parents doubt their ability to help their children because of their lack of education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Trotman, 2001). As a result, the age of children in itself becomes a barrier. Research reveals that parental engagement and involvement declines as students transition into higher levels of education (Herrold & O'Donnell, 2008). However, adolescents desire parental involvement and support in their schooling provided that parental involvement activities do not lessen their autonomy (Deslandes & Cloutier, 2002; Edwards & Alldred, 2000; Helwig, 2008). The research by Deslandes and Cloutier (2002) addresses this point. They studied 872 adolescent girls and 404 adolescent boys to determine and identify the types of parental involvement activities that students were willing to support. The study found positive relationships supporting parental involvement in schooling though the relationship was stronger amongst girls than boys (Deslandes & Cloutier, 2002). Nevertheless, the feeling of inadequacy persists because parents are not able to determine what level of involvement is needed at the secondary school level as it lies in contrast to the needs at the elementary level (Deslandes & Cloutier, 2002).

Given the positive relationship between family engagement and adolescents, parents should be encouraged to find ways to remain active and engaged throughout the educational process, especially as it relates to the transition from middle to high school



(Helwig, 2008; Mac Iver, Epstein, Sheldon, & Fonseca 2015; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). In a meta-analysis conducted by Jeynes (2016), the findings revealed that the effects of parental involvement in elementary and secondary education of children were almost the same, therefore giving credence to the need for parental involvement throughout the educational journey of children. Practical ways of remaining engaged in the process are described by Henderson and Mapp (2002). The research demonstrates that family-based processes such as speaking frequently with teenagers, helping them plan for postsecondary options, and keeping them focused on homework throughout the school year, successfully supports academic achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Another perception studied in the literature is that of parental expectations for their children's intelligence and how they learn or develop. Parents that perceive achievement being dependent on fixed intelligence or ability are less likely to be involved in the educational process, and view attendance at parent-teacher meetings or encouraging children to do their homework as a waste of time (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Yet, an additional perception revolves around how parents perceive the invitation from schools to engage. When parents think that engagement is not a priority for teachers or the school in general, and they experience negative interactions, they are less likely to engage or be involved (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; Hill & Torres, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Murray et al., 2014). In the study by Murray et al. (2014), parents reported that the invitation to be involved was almost non-existent with teachers, and when extended, it was primarily to address behavioral issues. Parents, therefore, perceive teachers as not being very concerned about relationship-building, but

rather are only concerned with addressing problems about their children (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Seitsinger, Felner, Brand, & Burns, 2008). This affects communication between parents and teachers (Demircan & Erden, 2015). Seitsinger et al (2008) reported that even though the results were moderate, that efforts from teachers to communicate with parents consistently correlated with teachers' attitudes and parent involvement. With minority populations, even though invitations may be given, perceptions of racism may further distance them from being involved (Koonce & Harper, 2005; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). In addition, schools can be seen as highly bureaucratic environments or culturally insensitive therefore impacting how welcoming they appear to parents (Hill & Torres, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; McWayne, Melzi, Limlingan & Schick, 2016).

Family perceptions are varied but nevertheless impact relational outcomes with educators. Even though families doubt their self-efficacy, or feel unwelcome in school environments, they still desire to be engaged in their children's education and development. How this engagement is perceived by educators continues to be debated.

**Educators' perceptions.** The fifth and final barrier to be examined is educators' perceptions. The literature surrounding attitudes and perceptions of educators concerning family engagement weighs heavily on teachers' perceptions, and to a lesser degree, principals' perceptions. The discussion centers on the fact that teachers, parents, and principals bring perceptions and attitudes that are "rooted within their own historical, economic, educational, ethnic, class and gendered experiences" (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 45). As such, parents and educators differ in how they perceive engagement in schooling (Hill & Torres, 2010; Lawson, 2003; Knopf & Swick, 2007). The difference in

perceptions presents a complex barrier. It is assumed that parents are not meeting their responsibilities of engagement in schools (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), but what are those responsibilities? Who determines what these responsibilities are? Lawson (2003) posits that teachers and parents differ in the meaning and function of parental involvement because teachers mostly view it as school-centric. Parents, in contrast, viewed the most basic of responsibilities towards their children as significant involvement (Lawson, 2003). For example, parents perceived that the time they spent assuring the safety of their children so they can attend school daily as an important component, while teachers did not see this involvement as remarkable or resilient (Lawson, 2003).

Knopf and Swick (2007) identified further misconceptions between parents and educators: (a) parents do not care and therefore do not support their children's education in the classroom, (b) parents do not have the time or motivation to be involved, and (c) parents are not interested in leadership roles. As noted in the literature on the perception of family and cultural diversity, these perceptions are contrary to the fact (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Torres, 2010; Murray, et al., 2014; Okagaki & Bingham, 2010). Nevertheless, efforts should be made to understand the perceptions of educators as they may have limited knowledge of other cultures, rate family engagement differently across groups, or bring their own cultural heritage and experience to the educational setting (Delgado Gaitan, 2012; Mundt, Gregory, Melzi & McWayne, 2015).

Another challenge is that educators retain and project bias perspectives on different ethnicities and parents of low SES. Prater (2002) reported that Blacks had a difficult time relating to school personnel and could not dispel misconceptions about the

interest they had in their children's education. Other parents less familiar with U.S. schools, and with less formal education, also had a difficult time communicating with educators (McWayne, Melzi, Limlingan & Schick, 2016; Okagaki & Bingham, 2010). Becerra (2012) reported that the findings in his study on barriers affecting the achievement of Latino students were consistent with other research, and confirmed that cultural misunderstandings between teachers and families impacted the level of parental involvement. Common misperceptions that teachers have about low SES parents typically focus on the efficacy and capacity of parents to be involved (Kim, 2009; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). However, the study by Seitsinger et al. (2008) suggests that parents across all SES levels are likely to reciprocate engagement if teachers communicate more often in every grade level.

Understanding the barriers to family engagement is key in working with families and educators to form effective partnerships (McWayne & Melzi, 2014). According to Williams & Sánchez (2011), if the barriers are examined from multiple stakeholder perspectives such as parents, researchers, and educators, then they are able to identify and enhance areas of collaboration between parents and school personnel. For example, if teachers and parents can acknowledge their differing worldviews, epistemologies, and cultural frameworks, then they may be able to see and develop their common interest, that common interest being student success (LaRocque, 2013; Lawson, 2003). Educators should recognize that the diversity of the school and district represent the diversity of ways parental engagement can occur (LaRocque, 2013), with the awareness that this may constantly be shifting. Otherwise, a lack of cultural awareness, understanding, and

communication will continue to pervade the practices and policies of the schools and districts (Gingsburg-Block, Manz, & McWayne, 2010).

Family engagement continues to be viewed from the deficit perspective of being present in the physical context of school programs, events, and meetings. However, it is imperative that family engagement incorporates the social and cultural capital and funds of knowledge that parents have to offer (Hill & Torres, 2010). This is fundamental for schools and school districts to shift their thinking in how they work with, and support families in the P-20 educational process.

### **Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness**

A part of supporting and engaging families in the P-20 educational process is extending the partnership in postsecondary and workforce readiness. The concept of *postsecondary and workforce readiness* is gaining momentum especially with the charge that was given by President Barack Obama's Race to the Top (RTT) initiative to raise standards and align policies and structures with the goal of making every student college and career ready (Race to the Top, 2009). But similar to family engagement, there are variations on the vocabulary. It is frequently referred to as *college and career readiness* in the literature. As much as the terms vary, so too do the definitions. This can be observed from the fact that different state boards and organizations have developed their own definition of *postsecondary and workforce readiness*. No matter what term is used, it is evident that school districts and state education agencies are increasingly placing emphasis on making sure that students graduating from high school are ready for college and work. For the purpose of this research, the terminology that will be used is

*postsecondary and workforce readiness* and the definition that will be observed comes from the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Higher Education previously explained in Chapter One.

**Aspirations for postsecondary interests.** Even though there are barriers to family engagement in schools and school districts as discussed in the previous sections, the literature points to positive ways in which family engagement impacts students' achievement and prepares them for college and work. A key way in which this happens is through aspirations for postsecondary interests. Research has shown over decades that teachers, parents, and peers play a key factor in influencing and supporting students' aspirations in college and career readiness (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Hallett & Griffen, 2015; Hossler et al., 1999; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). Research as early as Hossler et al. (1999) and McDonough (1997) demonstrates that students will not be able to gain the necessary knowledge to continue on to postsecondary options without the appropriate school culture, family influence, and guidance needed throughout their educational life-span.

It is evident in the literature that students who have parents that have not attended college find it more difficult to address issues related to college choice (Conley, 2010; Hallett & Griffen, 2015; McDonough, 1997;). However, even when parents have low educational attainment, and are from minority and immigrant populations, they still have high expectations for their children (Kirk et al., 201; Raleigh & Kao, 2010). In a study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics with over 54,000 households, it was reported that less than 1 percent of parents with children in grade 6 through 12

expected them to complete high school. Only 8 percent of those students had parents who expected them to graduate high school, but not continue with postsecondary education; another 8 percent had parents who expected them to attend a vocational or technical institution after graduating high school. The study further reported that 13 percent of these students had parents who expected them to attend 2 or more years of college while a higher number of 40 percent of parents expected their children to finish a four or five-year degree. Lastly, 30 percent of parents expected their children to earn a graduate or a professional degree (Herrold, O'Donnell, 2008). Therefore, there is value in encouraging and supporting parental aspirations to form early positive college-going attitudes (Raleigh & Kao, 2010). These early interventions do not guarantee that students will go to college, but they present a viable option in the minds of students and foster consideration regarding future academic choices (Hossler et al., 1999; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

As such, there is significance for schools in intentionally shaping programs and curriculum with the possibilities for academic and personal growth in postsecondary and workforce readiness activities. A focus on these activities can help students become more aware of their preferences, and maybe even determine possibilities and discover their passions which can lead to more involvement in school (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012).

Intentionality in shaping early aspirations and attitudes towards postsecondary interests can begin at even the elementary level. Research in younger children's attitude towards college suggests that there are implications in preparing students early to develop and characterize an attitude towards postsecondary interests (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012). In their research on a school-wide program designed to provide middle grade students

with opportunities to explore their interests and abilities in relation to current educational experiences and future career and college goals, the researchers found that many students felt that they were lazy, lacked motivation, or needed more confidence (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012). The research demonstrated that students who are exposed to college and career development activities begin to develop and expand their sense of these options (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012). In addition, students become more reflective and realistic about their college and career options and what they need to do to succeed. These interventions are likely to enhance and engage students in the self-reflective practice of becoming aware of who they are, and what they are capable of accomplishing throughout their educational journey (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012).

Family engagement has the potential to contribute to developing these aspirations, especially since it is widely known that family engagement has a positive impact on academic achievement (Bornstein, 2006; Dearing & Tang, 2010; Englund et al., 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2010). Froiland et al. (2013) maintained that parents can have an affirming influence on academic achievement through early home literacy, but they are also able to preserve optimism and a strong hope that their children will flourish in postsecondary choices (Froiland et al., 2013; Raleigh & Kao, 2010). Auerbach (2009) and Raleigh and Kao (2010) suggested that schools should start early to reinforce postsecondary aspirations within families, and they should be introduced to the idea of planning for college. According to Conley (2010), this is particularly important for first-generation college students since parents may not be aware of the options available, or even think that postsecondary studies are possible. The realization also



needs to occur for minority populations, and creative solutions should be utilized to engage families that are non-English speaking (Conley, 2010; McCarron, & Inkelas, 2006; Raleigh & Kao, 2010). On the contrary, what actually occurs is that schools are not creative in engaging families in this process, especially for diverse learners. Meetings and other means of communication do not happen in a language other than English, and as a result, families are less likely to engage (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

In order to continue the quest for equal access to postsecondary education and workforce skills, more will need to be done to give both parents and their children a collective efficacy in making choices about attending college, pursuing other postsecondary options, and developing necessary skills (Kirk et al., 2011). Efficacy is fundamental for families because even though they may want to help their children in these choices and preparations, they may not know what to do. Educators should be aware that wanting to help is not the same as knowing what to do (Okagaki & Bingham, 2010). According to Tierney & Auerbach (2004) and Hill & Torres (2010), investing in parents as resources for student achievement and college-going aspirations could have a ripple effect in education, especially for populations that are underrepresented. Hallett and Griffen (2015) found that parents of low-income, first-generation college students had an advantage when they received information about college and finances as early as middle school. Parents were able to make plans for college as information became available (Hallett & Griffen, 2015). Aspirations for students to pursue postsecondary options can be realized when parents are provided basic resources and tools that they may lack (Helwig, 2008). Educators stand to have significant and positive outcomes for

postsecondary and workforce readiness by engaging families and their aspirations in the process.

**School and school district culture.** Another approach in which the literature points to positive ways in which family engagement impacts students' achievement and prepares them for college and work is through school and district culture. As there are efforts to connect home to school, and school to home in partnership with families, schools and school districts will need to consider the culture as perceived by various stakeholders because culture has wide and varied associations. However, to structure the context of the current study, culture will be examined in light of the values that it can create.

According to Deal & Peterson (2009), the culture of a school and a school district consist of stable, underlying meanings that shape values, beliefs, and attitudes over time. Culture, therefore, plays an important role in exemplary performance, and can also be a form of capacity or a channel that builds effective partnerships (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Schools and school districts will, therefore, need to examine how the culture supports and shapes engagement, motivation, cooperation, relationships and aspirations, and further guides successful choices at every level (Hobby, 2004). Examining the culture in this regard and making efforts to foster family engagement in PWR will not only keep the home and school connected, but the skills and commitment of students and parents will be enhanced over time (Moles & Fege, 2011).

Given the above overview of culture, there is a specific need to uncover ways to support students in their training for and pursuit of postsecondary degrees (Bowen,

Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). This especially includes students in lower SES, first generation college-bound students, and students from Black, Latino/a, and American Indian backgrounds (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Hallett & Griffen, 2015; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). These students stand a lower probability of obtaining college degrees (Aud et al., 2010; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Therefore, schools and school districts have an opportunity to foster a culture where educators anticipate, encourage, and provide practical steps for all students to access what they need for college and career (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). Even further, a culture that emphasizes postsecondary and workforce preparation can influence how curriculum develops, how teaching happens, how families and communities are engaged, and how students' needs are addressed (Tierney, 2001). As school and district cultures develop around changing values and mindsets that see postsecondary interests as possibilities for all students, families and communities will become more engaged in educational achievement (Tierney, 2001).

### **Summary of the Literature**

In reviewing the literature on family engagement and postsecondary and workforce readiness, it is determined that various stakeholders in schools and school districts contribute perspectives on how these two spheres intersect. Ignoring the different perceptions will create further barriers to family engagement, and have a ripple effect on student achievement and their future pursuits.

Family engagement, therefore, serves as a viable channel to fostering a PWR culture but needs to be a systemic, integrated, and sustained strategy (Weiss et al., 2010).

As a systemic strategy, family engagement is purposefully aligned with core factors of educational goals and is not merely programmatic. Integrated family engagement continues this strand by being embedded into structures and processes and considers the social and cultural wealth that families have to offer. Lastly, sustained family engagement works to build partnerships to impact student learning for the long term that essentially prepares students for the demands of a global society (Weiss et al., 2010).

The current chapter on the literature around family engagement and PWR sets the foundation for this research. Chapter Three will examine existing theoretical frameworks about family engagement and propose a theoretical framework for the study. Chapter Four will provide details on the methodology used for the study. Chapter Five will present the findings, and Chapter Six will discuss the findings, implications, and provide recommendations for future research.

### **Chapter Three: Theoretical Models of Family Engagement**

*I think the families are key. Right? What we want to do is build this community culture of readiness and aspiration and belief that our kids can and will succeed in whatever that postsecondary thing is, right?*

—Linda

#### **Introduction**

Many theoretical models exist around parent involvement or family engagement in the literature, from frameworks created by researchers such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004), Epstein's Six Types of Involvement Model (Epstein, 1995), to those constructed by the U.S. Department of Education, such as the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Evident in these models is the goal to engage families to achieve higher academic outcomes for students. For the purpose of this research, there are three frameworks that will be observed: (a) Model of the Parental Involvement Process by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010); (b) Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 1995); (c) the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-

School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). These frameworks are selected because they will contribute to the new theoretical model proposed by the researcher. A brief overview of the models will first be provided. The chapter will conclude with the Model of Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness, a theoretical framework that posits family engagement on a P-20 continuum.

### **Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler Model of the Parental Involvement Process**

The first theoretical model that will be examined was developed in 1995 by Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey and Howard M. Sandler from Vanderbilt University. The model has since seen revisions in 1997, 2005, 2007 and 2010. Using a psychological theory, the model explains why parents become involved in their children's educational experience, and why their involvement may make a difference in student learning outcomes. The theoretical model represents years of research on family involvement in children's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010). The framework is structured in five levels which are outlined below, and depicted in Figure 1:

1. Level 1 suggests that three main factors influence the type and frequency of parental involvement – personal motivators, parents' perception of invitation to be involved, and life context variables.
2. Level 1.5 defines several forms of parental involvement – values, goal, involvement activities at home, and school, and communication from school/teacher to parent.

3. Level 2 maintains that parents influence the attributes of students that are necessary for succeeding mainly through four forms of activities – encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction.
4. Level 3 discusses student perceptions. When students perceive their parents' behavior and beliefs, it transfers into academic achievement.
5. Level 4 puts some responsibility on students and views them as contributors to their achievement through academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation to learn, self-regulatory strategy, and social self-efficacy for relating to teachers.
6. Level 5 shows the final outcome. If parents are involved in each level as outlined in the framework, then that involvement will predict student learning outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010).

The model presented by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2010) attempts to provide a holistic approach by incorporating parents' perceptions of invitations to involvement and life context variables; the life context variables relate to knowledge and skills of parents, time and energy, and family culture. The psychological approach captures parents' perceptions in constructing involvement in their children's education. This approach was previously missing in the research.

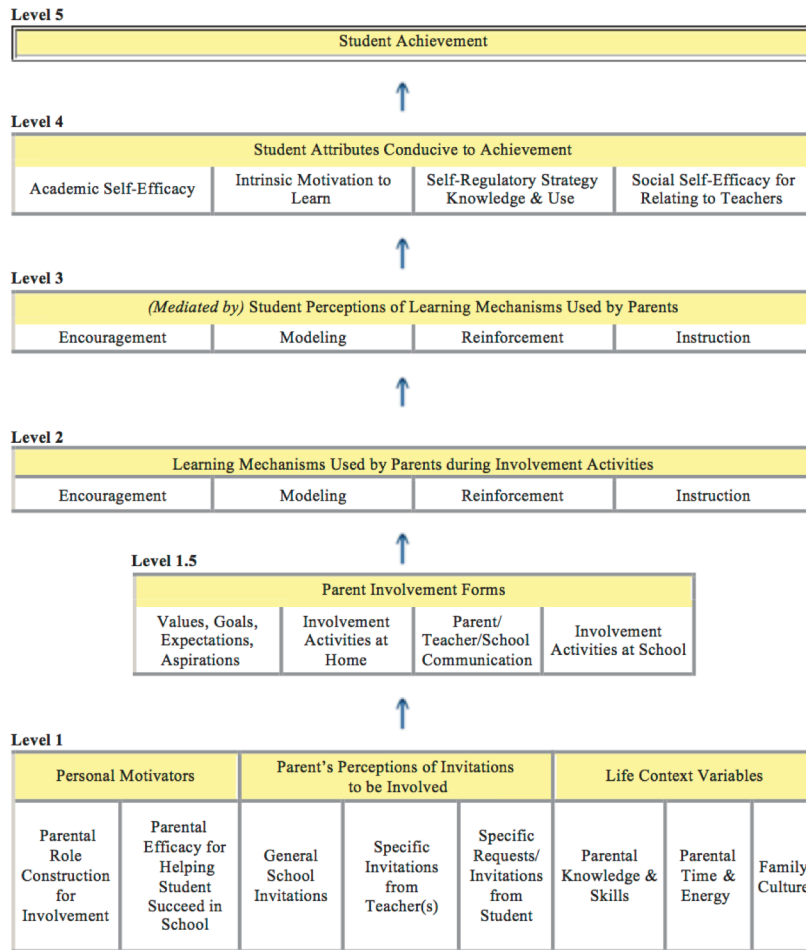
The Model of the Parental Improvement Process (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010) is one of the more explicit frameworks that points directly to psychological factors—personal motivators, parent's perception, and life context—and which does not immediately call upon a programmatic or structural context. The psychological approach taken on by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2010) is evident and supported in the research

conducted by Green et al. (2007), where one of the major findings indicated that interpersonal relationships were the single most important factor behind parental involvement in a child's education. Since the model applies a psychological approach, it ultimately examines how partnerships between families and educators can be built using more intrinsic skills such as self-efficacy, aspirations, encouragement, and modeling. The process of the framework is grounded in psychological and educational research (e.g., Sheldon, 2002).

Based on the parameters of this research, the Model of the Parental Improvement Process (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010) is highly desirable as it tries to explain why parents are motivated to be involved (Tekin, 2011). However, the framework lacks terminologies that span across schools and school districts that meet the cultural diversity of the academic setting. For example, parents' perception of invitations to involvement focuses on school and teacher invitations. Other school and school district personnel are not explicit in the model. The use of the word "parents" in the model also presents a challenge. Though "parents" is defined in the broader context of the research conducted by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2010), it presents opportunities for deficit thinking when implementing the framework. The same challenge also arises through the use of the word "involvement." As discussed in the literature review, involvement implies "doing to" and tends to be more structural and programmatic (Ferlazzo, 2011). The language in the Model of the Parental Improvement Process (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010), therefore, lacks inclusivity.



**Figure 1.** Model of the Parental Involvement Process



*Figure 1.* Schematic drawing of the Model of the Parental Improvement Process explaining parents' motivation for becoming involved, through to parent's choice of different types of involvement and varied learning mechanisms as they support children and adolescents in their learning. The model then moves through learning attributes that are influenced by parents' involvement and concludes with learning outcomes. Adapted from "Motivation and commitment to family-school partnerships" by Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Whitaker, M. C., & Ice, C. L., 2010 in S. Christenson, & A. L. Reschly (Eds.). *Handbook of school-family partnerships*. New York: NY: Routledge.

An additional challenge with the framework is the linear process of the different levels. The model passes from one level to the next, thereby assuming that success is needed in each level before moving on to the next. Even further, it is questionable if

emphasis should be placed in varying degrees in each level. By using the structural nature of levels, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2010) have implied hierarchy in the process. However, family engagement in the educational process may be much more recursive and complex.

### **Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement**

This framework was also first developed in 1995 by Joyce L. Epstein and is highly regarded in the education field. Since its development, many educators continue to use the framework to shape parent involvement programs with the goal of developing school-family partnerships. The core of the six types of involvement has remained the same over time, even though boards of education, districts, and schools have expanded how the principles play out in their specific contexts. The argument presented by Epstein (1995) is that if educators see children as merely students then they are likely to limit their expectations of the family. As a result, family would be disconnected from the educational process and the education of children would be left up to the schools. However, if educators see children as children, then they would regard families and communities as partners in the educational and developmental process (Epstein, 1995). After conducting several studies with parents, teachers and students, Epstein (1995) developed the Framework of Six Types of Involvement to help educators construct improved comprehensive programs for school and family partnerships. The goal was also for researchers to be able to inform and improve practice (Epstein, 1995). The six types of involvement are summarized below:

1. Parenting – involves helping all families establish a home environment that supports their children.

2. Communicating – developing and creating effective two-way communication channels between school and home about school programs and children’s progress.
3. Volunteering – recruiting parents that involve them as volunteers in school-based activities.
4. Learning at home – providing information and ideas to parents so that they can be involved in the academic learning, decision and planning at home
5. Decision making – including parents in the decision-making process of the schools, developing parent representatives and leaders.
6. Collaborating with community – finding and incorporating available community resources to strengthen student learning and development (Epstein, 1995).

The types of involvement listed in the framework are helpful and essential to building an inclusive environment. The framework shows that involvement is not a single technique, but there are several ways to be involved such as through school programs, volunteering in school-based activities, communicating between home and school about the academic progress of students, and parents being involved in the decision-making process of the schools. However, the terminologies used in the model present some limitations as they did in the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2010) model. For example, the use of the word “parenting” connotes the immediate relationships of mother, father; also, “learning at home” may be synonymous with homework (Nathan & Revelle, 2013). The model resonates with programs and interventions for family engagement from the

institutional perspective, and provides more of a guide for educators (Kohl et al., 2000; Tekin, 2011), but lacks the integration of the parents' voice (Tekin, 2011), as well as the knowledge and experience that families are able to offer in building a partnership with schools and districts.

While there are also practical applications that may be useful for the context of the current research study such as helping families in decision and planning at home, Epstein's model appears more programmatic in nature, and the emphasis is on involvement rather than engagement which is a key variable in this study.

### **Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships**

The last framework to be observed is the Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Recognizing that a focus on family engagement in schools and districts across the United States is an integral strategy to school reform, the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) was developed between the U.S. Department of Education, and Harvard Graduate School of Education. The framework is designed to build adult capacity with educators and families as they partner together to shape student success (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The framework is based in research and best practices in home-school partnership strategies, adult learning, and motivation (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). However, the model acts more as a scaffold for school, districts, and boards of education as they develop family engagement strategies, policies, and programs (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

The framework is shown in a diagrammatic representation in Figure 2, and covers the four areas outlined below:

1. A description of the challenge that states, districts, and schools face in cultivating and sustaining positive relationships with families.
2. An outline of the conditions that are foundational to building successful family-school partnership initiatives and interventions. The conditions related to the process are linked to learning, relationships, development versus service oriented, collaborative and interactive, while the conditions linked to organization are systemic, integrated, and sustained.
3. An identification of the capacity goals for family engagement policies and programs at the federal, state and local levels. These are referred to as the 4 C Model: (a) capabilities – skills and knowledge, (b) connections – networks, (c) cognition – beliefs and values, and (d) confidence – self-efficacy.
4. A description of the capacity-building outcomes for all the stakeholders which will support student learning and achievement (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Unlike the Model of the Parental Improvement Process (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010), and Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement (1995), the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) makes reference to *families* rather than *parents* and clarifies that the terminology applies to any adult caretaker who has the responsibility for the well-being of a child or children (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The use of *family* allows the model to be more inclusive about who is engaged in the educational process, and gives consideration to the cultural diversity of the

student population in school districts. There is also a focus and significant effort to build capacity not just with families, but with the educators, thereby acknowledging the partnership concentration of the family-school relationship.

**Figure 2.** The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships



*Figure 2.* Schematic drawing of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships which lays out a process to guide schools and districts to building successful family-school partnerships. Adapted from Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships. *SEDL Advancing Research Improving Education*.

Family engagement needs to consider the wealth of experiences families bring to the academic practice of students. A framework that deeply considers family culture, and incorporates their funds of knowledge would bring value in constructing a partnership. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) seeks to highlight the facets of family culture and their funds of knowledge in its model and is therefore more inclusive. Another aspect of inclusivity is the emphasis in the model to build capacity for school personnel and for families. Both educators and families collaborate in student learning (Ishimaru, 2017). As such, the framework stands apart from the previous models that focused on deficit customs in which families could be engaged. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) demonstrate in their research that enhanced capacity with families, schools and school districts will cultivate sustained, respectful, and effective partnerships. The model does not focus on families only, but brings other stakeholders into play and recognizes the collaborative process that is needed for effective family engagement resulting in student achievement and school improvement.

However, the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner) is also linear in its construct. It outlines steps that need to be taken by schools and school districts to build partnership with families. While it recognizes that family-school partnerships need to be embedded in policy goals, there is also a programmatic focus to its design. Therefore, the framework continues to privilege engagement which is more school-based (Ishimaru, 2017). The framework also defines

school-family partnerships as ineffective or effective thereby creating a predetermined construct of the partnerships that exist in schools and school districts.

### **Summary of the Models of Family Engagement**

In observing the theoretical frameworks, each model presents a valid schema, and there are obvious overlaps. Central to each are the themes of family engagement and student achievement, no matter the terminologies used. This study acknowledges the wealth of research that has been conducted regarding family engagement and student achievement as it gives credence to the value of family engagement in the educational development and success of students (e.g., Bornstein, 2006; Dearing & Tang, 2010; Englund et al., 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2010). However, the models lack the holistic approach that is needed for this research. Acknowledging a holistic approach, this chapter now moves into a proposed framework that considers the family construct beyond the immediate relation of mother and father, the cultural backgrounds that families bring to educating their children, the multiple forms in which family engagement occurs, the stakeholders across schools and school districts engaged in the educational process, and the outcomes that emerge not just for families, but all stakeholders in the partnership.

### **Model of Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness**

**Introduction.** The Model of Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (FEPWR) constructs an approach that incorporates inclusive language, and a continuum of family engagement across P-20. While the FEPWR Model incorporates aspects of the three frameworks examined in this chapter, much of the



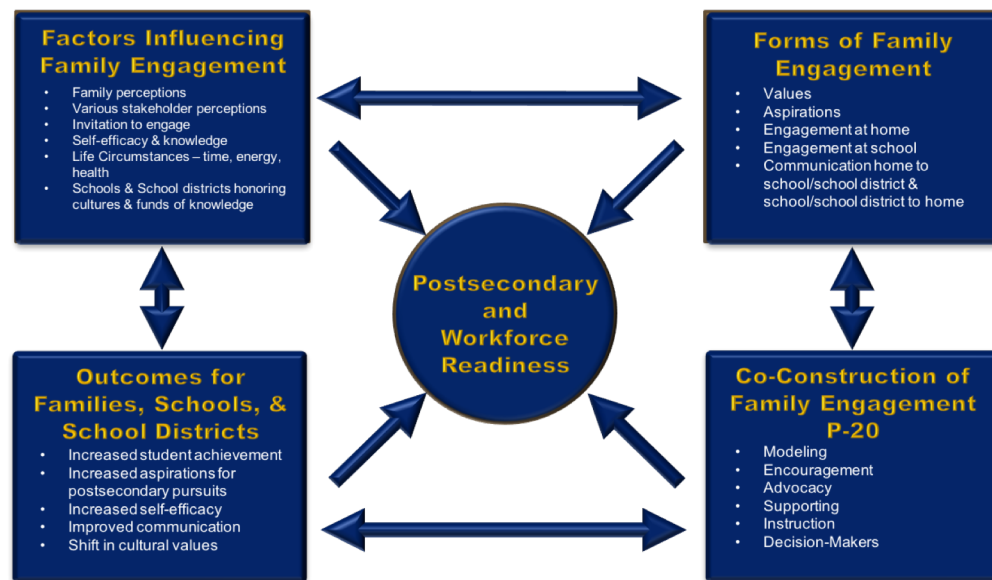
adaptation by the researcher comes from the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2010) Model of the Parental Involvement Process because of the emphasis on psychological factors.

However, the researcher has modified the model to be more inclusive in language, to address educators and not just teachers in a school district and to be applicable in PWR thereby bringing a P-20 focus. The proposed theoretical framework will give consideration to the diversity in home configurations. The researcher will also take into account that previous frameworks are geared towards teachers or schools rather than a cross-section of stakeholders in schools, and districts.

The FEPWR Model is the basic recognition that family engagement is nested in students' external and internal environments at school and outside the school context. It seeks to identify the influence of culture, values, and families' aspirations. These characteristics, however, are not in the vacuum of the family environment and separate from that of the school environment. Rather, family engagement in PWR is a co-constructive process that involves the various stakeholders from different environments. In this partnership, families are actively acknowledged for the value they offer in the future preparation of students. Their value and contributions are not based in the expectation to participate in prescribed programs and structures in order for their actions to be counted as family engagement (Ferlazzo, 2011; Sheridan & Kim, 2015; Tolan & Woo, 2010; Weiss et al., 2010). Instead, they are able to co-construct their experiences and knowledge with various stakeholders in the academic learning environment of their children (Weiss et al., 2010). There are four quadrants in the model of FEPWR: (a) factors influencing family engagement, (b) forms of family engagement, (c) co-

construction of family engagement, and (d) outcomes of family engagement. All the quadrants are connected to PWR. The directionality of the arrows indicates the interconnectedness between the quadrants (see Figure 3). Salient in the FEPWR Model is that the process is recursive and complex rather than tiered, linear or cyclical and this is evident in the interplay between the arrows. Each quadrant is not exclusive of the other. The four quadrants are described below and shown in a diagrammatic representation in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** The Model of Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness



*Figure 3.* Schematic drawing of the Model of Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness which presents four quadrants of family engagement in schools and school districts that are salient to effective postsecondary and workforce readiness. Adapted from the Model of the Parental Involvement Process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010); Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 1995), and the Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

**Factors influencing family engagement.** The first quadrant calls for an examination of the factors influencing family engagement. As reviewed in the literature, there are several factors that influence family engagement in schools and school districts. Some of these factors are perceptions held by families about what family engagement is (e.g. Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Kim, 2009; Koonce & Harper, 2005; Leiber-Miller, 2012), perceptions held by educators about what they perceive as family engagement (e.g. Hill & Torres, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Lawson, 2003; McWayne, Melzi, Limlingan & Schick, 2016; Okagaki & Bingham, 2010), and invitation to be engaged (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010) among others.

**Forms of family engagement.** The second quadrant acknowledges that family engagement takes different forms both from the perspectives of the families and the perspectives of educators including teachers, principals, school district personnel. From a more inclusive definition, family engagement recognizes values, goals and aspirations, engagement at home, engagement at school, communication from home-to-school/school district and from school/school district-to-home. The varied forms of family engagement in this quadrant minimizes the tendency for educators to privilege particular forms of engagement over others.

**Co-construction of family engagement.** The third quadrant places emphasis on family engagement as a co-constructed process. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) refer to this co-construction as a shared partnership. The quadrant recognizes that families and educators can be engaged in PWR for students through modeling, encouragement, advocacy,

instruction, decision-making, and other supportive roles. The relationship is not solely dependent on any single environment such as the academic setting, the home construction, or the social setting.

**Outcomes for families, schools and school districts.** The last quadrant observes the outcomes not just for schools, but identifies that there are also outcomes for school districts and families. The outcomes demonstrate a sustained system that brings value to all the stakeholders engaged in PWR. By explicitly stating that the outcomes relate to families, schools and school districts, the language immediately becomes more inclusive and considers not only teachers as mentioned in previous models.

**Postsecondary and workforce readiness.** All four quadrants point to PWR because they essentially shape and support how students pursue postsecondary options. In addition, schools and school districts are able to identify how they may develop and sustain an increased postsecondary and workforce readiness partnership.

While there are researched-based theoretical models to give schools and districts practical ways to develop effective family engagement, an approach is still needed that considers a P-20 continuum, and that is more linguistically and culturally inclusive. A theoretical framework with specific attention on school and school personnel as agents who have bearing on family engagement in PWR is missing. The framework proposed in this study will focus on all those aspects. This theoretical framework has not been empirically used to explore family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness. Nevertheless, research has confirmed the relationship between family engagement and student achievement (Bornstein, 2006; Dearing & Tang, 2010; Englund

et al., 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2010), and between family engagement and post high school aspirations (Auerbach, 2004; Becerra, 2012; Gonzalez, 2012; Kirk et al., 2011; McWayne & Melzi, 2014; Redding, Murphy & Sheley, 2011; Tierney & Auerbach, 2004;). Extending the research into PWR is a natural synthesis that requires further exploration.

## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

*“I love what I do and I’m excited to be a part of it, and education is changing so much in kids and the needs and what the demands placed upon our kids. And I just hope that we do everything that we can to serve them well, given that there is so much that’s unknown. But that we, again, that we do everything we can to make sure that their choices are their own choices. And that we haven’t limited those choices, because we haven’t been forward thinking or because we want things to look like it did for us. It’s not my education. It’s their education. That’s it!”*

—Susan

### **Research Question**

As the purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness, the key research question that will be addressed in this study is, “What are the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in a suburban school district?” From the literature review in Chapter Two, it is observed that not only schools, but also families are integral to the future of students. Because PWR fits into the realm of the future course for students, this study contributes to the literature on how

family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness is perceived by various stakeholders.

Therefore, understanding how the various stakeholders in the school district conceptualize family engagement in PWR is important to ascertain. Although the literature concludes that family engagement significantly influences educational outcomes (Bornstein, 2006; Dearing & Tang, 2010; Englund et al., 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2010) few studies have focused on a variety of perceptions especially including families, teachers, and administrators collectively. Englund et al. (2004) call for further research on the perceptions of teachers and parental involvement. The literature demonstrates this research focus where teacher perceptions are often considered alongside with parent perceptions (Gordon & Louis, 2009; Seitsinger et al., 2008), and considered less with principals' or other educators' perceptions together with families' perceptions (Gordon & Louis, 2009). So then, a more holistic approach that spans various stakeholders at different levels is lacking (Cohen, Linker & Stutts, 2006; William & Sánchez, 2011). Even further, is the need to look at family not from the limited perspectives of parents as examined in the literature, but to explore the perceptions of the members in the home configuration, the family members, who support and advocate the educational process for their children.

### **Why Qualitative Research?**

Given the scarcity of research surrounding the perception of various stakeholders in a school district on family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness, a qualitative design was chosen for the study. Qualitative research is an inquiry process that

provides a comprehensive picture in narrative forms such as words, storytelling, and pictures (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). It seeks to uncover the phenomenon of those involved and looks at how people interpret their experiences, give meaning to those experiences and how they construct their worlds (Merriam, 2016). The emic meaning of the participants' perspective is sought for understanding rather than the etic view of the researcher (Merriam, 2016). This means that the researcher tries to understand the phenomenon from the participant's perspective, and not her own (Merriam, 2016).

Consistent with a qualitative approach, the types of questions asked in the research sought an understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants and not the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), which ultimately resulted in learning (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault (2015) express that all perspectives are worthy of being studied for the qualitative researcher. With this consideration in mind, a qualitative approach was highly desirable for this study. The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to consider the perceptions of the various stakeholders from different vantage points. The perspectives of families were just as important as the Superintendent's, the principals', the teachers', and the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness.

Finally, a qualitative study allowed the researcher to give voice to the various stakeholders in the study. Qualitative research permits empowerment of individuals to "share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and participant" (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Quantitative research often situates the researcher as the source of authority (Karnieli-Miller, 2009). However,



a qualitative approach values the contribution of the participants. As the participants' experiences were examined, and their perspectives were being explored, they were engaged throughout the study. The unique contribution of the researcher and participants encompassed an interpretive confluence of both (Fabian, 2008).

### **Why a Case Study?**

The purpose of a case study is to develop an in-depth understanding of a single case or to explore an issue or problem by using the case as an illustration (Creswell, 2013). A case study arises out of the desire of the researcher to understand complex social phenomena, and ultimately contribute to knowledge in the area (Yin, 2014). The case studied in this research was within a bounded system, that is, it was bounded by time and space (Stake, 2005). In regard to this study, the unit of analysis was a small suburban school district in the western United States of America. An in-depth understanding of perceptions of family engagement in PWR was the central phenomenon. The study was further bounded by time as it took place over a six-month period.

The case study is complex and multi-layered, but is particularly useful for its rich, descriptive, and heuristic qualities (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). In this lies its strength as the case study is able to provide thick details using multiple sources to gain multiple perspectives (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). An additional benefit of case study research is that it can ask questions of “what,” “why,” and “how,” and so is able to capture the unique aspects of each situation, and more specifically of each stakeholder in this study (Yin, 2014). Using aspects of the above characteristics of the case study, the researcher sought to understand the multiple views and interactions of stakeholders in the school

district environment, the researcher worked towards exposing different patterns that were not initially apparent, which allowed for even further research, development of policy, preparation of teachers, and increase in the level of educational standards (Timmons & Cairns, 2009).

Stake (1995) presents three classifications for case studies: (1) intrinsic, (2) instrumental, and (3) collective. The intrinsic case study is undertaken when the case is of particular interest, and better understanding is being sought. The researcher is not trying to understand an abstract construct or build theory. The instrumental case study is used to examine a case chiefly to provide understanding of an issue, while the collective classification refers to a number of cases being studied to investigate a phenomenon (Stake, 1995; Stake, 2005).

This research used an instrumental case study approach. The approach was selected to provide a deeper understanding of perceptions from the various stakeholders regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in the district. The researcher used the bounded case of a school district to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2013), and possibly contribute to the larger field of education (Timmons & Cairns, 2009). While the case study does not permit generalization in a statistical context, the case may be seen as typical of other cases (Stake, 2005). As an instrumental case study, the researcher offered thick descriptions in Chapter Five so that the reader could determine if the case findings may be transferable in a different school district (Grandy, 2009).

Additionally, Yin (2014) presents a typology describing the three general purposes of case study: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. The exploratory case

study investigates a phenomenon and defines the research question of a subsequent study. The descriptive design works towards presenting a complete description of the phenomenon within its context, while the explanatory case study seeks cause and effect relationships (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The purpose of each may not be entirely distinct or completely separate, but the researcher typically selects the approach that is applicable based on the research question that frames the study (Yin, 2014). As it relates to the current study, the researcher described the district and the context of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness activities, however, the primary purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding family engagement in PWR for the school district. Therefore, the researcher designed an exploratory, instrumental case study to address the research question. The following sections will extensively describe the methodology used for the study.

### **Sample**

**Data site.** Situated in the western region of the United States, the Constant Spring School District (pseudonym used to protect school district and participants) is nestled in a suburban community and serves approximately 2800 students in preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. According to City-Data.com (2013), the population of the neighborhood is 76.5% White, 16.1% Hispanic, 3.9% Two or More Races, 1.8% Black, and 1.5% Asian with Other Race and American Indian at approximately 0.2% each. The median household income in 2013 was \$46,290 while the national median household income was at \$54,462 in 2013 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, 2015). The neighborhood of the Constant Spring School district is not regarded as a White middle-class community. Rather, as a suburban

community, the neighborhood is regarded as working middle-class based on the most common occupations of residents provided by City-Data.com (2013). The demographics of the Constant Spring School District do not exactly represent the demographics of the neighborhood. The school district has more than twice the number of students who identify as Hispanics at 38%, a lesser percentage of White at 53%, while the other races directly reflect the neighborhood's census data (Colorado Department of Education, 2016).

The Constant Spring School District consists of two high schools, two middle schools, four elementary schools, and one early childhood education center. According to the Colorado Department of Education SchoolView database (2016), 58% of students are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch in school district, 12% are English Language Learners, and 5% of students are considered homeless (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). The Constant Spring School District has 25% of its students who are from outside of the school district. This is so because the school district is considered a Public School of Choice. The Choice of Programs and Schools within School Districts Act (1995) allows students to enroll in Colorado school districts for which they are not zoned; this is also known as open enrollment.

The school district serves an established community including families where members deeply identify with the communal culture. The connection is such that it is common for multiple generations of families to live in close proximity. Additionally, the school district enjoys low turnover rate among teachers and staff. Teachers communicated that staying for 16 years was not enough to give them the status of

seniority in longevity as it did in neighboring districts. As a result, it was common for teachers in the Constant Spring School District to have taught the parents of their current students. In some cases, teachers also taught grandparents and other extended family members including aunts and uncles.

The site was chosen for this study because of its mission and vision which emphasize all students and preparing them as successful graduates who are leaders, thinkers, and explorers of the future. The school district has a concentrated focus on postsecondary and workforce readiness for its students as part of this mission and even has a full-time school district administrator dedicated to this role. However, the school district is seeking alternative perspectives to successfully accomplish this mission. This is even more imperative for the school district as it has not met the state standards for graduation and completion rates in the past four years, and dropout rates have been above the state average for the past five consecutive years (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). One such avenue to explore would be through engaging families. By gathering the perceptions of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness from the various stakeholders in this study, the district will be able to identify opportunities and challenges on how to engage families. Rather than students being ready for postsecondary pursuits based mainly on instruction and programming, the district desires to also partner with families to be more engaged in the process.

**Participants.** The participants of this study were families of students, principals, teachers, the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness, and the Superintendent, all bounded within the Constant Spring School District. Refer to Table 1

for a basic description of the participants and size of the population. Since the Constant Spring School District was considered a relatively small community, the participants for the interviews were recruited through two different strategies, more specifically, purposive sampling and direct invitation. The recruitment strategy for each type of participant is outlined in the paragraphs following Table 1.

Table 1

*Description of Participants' Role and Population Size*

<b>Participants' Role</b>	<b># in Population</b>	<b># of Participants</b>
Superintendent	1	1
Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness	1	1
Principals (1 from each level – elementary, middle & high)	11	4
Teachers (1 from each level – elementary, middle and high)	196	3
Families (Households based on # of students)	2700	7
Total participants		16

As an added incentive, the participants were also offered a gift card to Target stores for participating in the research study. Participants therefore received a gift card with a personal thank you note at the end of each interview.

***Families.*** Participants in this category were selected using purposive sampling. More specifically, the researcher tried to obtain a sample of family members that met the demographics of the school district. Table 2 outlines the demographic in the school district and the number of family members that were selected from each ethnicity. To select family participants for the research, an email was sent to all families in the school

district. The invitation was sent out by the school district head office with one of its newsletters so that it could attract the most attention. See Appendix A for the sample

Table 2

*Description of the School District's Demographics and the Number of Family Members in Each Category*

<b>Race &amp; Ethnicity</b>	<b>% in Constant Spring School District</b>	<b># of family members chosen from each demographic</b>
American Indian (AI) or Alaskan Native (AN)	1%	0
Asian	1%	0
Black	3%	1
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0%	0
Hispanic	38%	3
White	53%	3
Total participants		7

blast that was sent in the newsletter to families. Since the research aimed to contextualize families according to a more inclusive definition, as well as to obtain a deeper understanding from families about their perceptions of family engagement and what that looks like in postsecondary and workforce readiness, the researcher was intentional about capturing the voices of families that were from varying ethnicities who may not typically have a voice. Therefore, the invitation was sent in English and Spanish and families were informed that a certified Spanish translator would be available if needed. The invitation protocol was approved by the Constant Spring School District Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approved by the university's IRB. Participants were also informed that there would be no identifiable information and that pseudonyms would be used in the report of the data.

Only one family expressed an interest in the study through the invitation from the newsletter. The family was sent further information regarding the study, along with the consent form for the study (see Appendix B). The family followed up with the researcher confirming a desire to participate in the study and an interview date and time were arranged.

As the researcher was not able to obtain families via the communication sent out in the district newsletter, she discussed with administrators in the school district if there were possible events where she could connect with families. The researcher was able to attend the suggested event. Since the researcher did not have any prior connections to families in the district, she was partnered with a school principal who helped to introduce her to families and establish trust and credibility in the research. The researcher also accompanied the introduction with a flier regarding the study (see Appendix A). After speaking with several families at the event, four additional families willing expressed an interest to participate in the study.

The final two families were recruited via school principals. After the principals were interviewed by the researcher, she asked for recommendations regarding families who met the following criteria:

1. May be any family member – mother, father, aunt, uncle, older sibling over 18 who is not a student in the district.
2. May or may not be a very involved/engaged family (as defined by schools – meaning always at events, sits on the school board etc.).
3. Of varying ethnicities (if possible).



The principals had several recommendations and volunteered to follow up by reaching out to the families. The principals provided the researcher's contact information to the families. Two families responded and asked the principals for the researcher to directly contact them and provided best times to call. The researcher followed-up with the interested family members to provide further information about the study and arranged a time and place to meet for the interviews.

***Teachers, principals, Superintendent, Director of Postsecondary and Workforce***

***Readiness.*** Due to the relatively small size of the Constant Spring School District, participants in these categories were directly invited to participate in the study. Table 1 outlines how many participants were interviewed in relation to these positions. Participation was completely voluntary. Invitation in this category included information explaining the study and requesting participation (see Appendix A). The invitation protocol was approved by the Constant Spring School District Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approved by the university's IRB. Participants were also informed that there would be no identifiable information and that pseudonyms would be used in the report of the data.

**Research Design**

**Data collection.** This study was designed to collect data that could be used to inform family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness. Since family engagement is intrinsically linked to student achievement (Bornstein, 2006; Dearing & Tang, 2010; Englund et al., 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2010), it will likely have positive outcomes in postsecondary and workforce readiness. An

exploratory case study provided the platform to access this information. Yin (2014) suggests that evidence for case studies may come from many sources. Consistent with a case study design, the primary sources of information for this investigation were interviews with various stakeholders, observations of meetings and activities for postsecondary and workforce readiness, and documentary information (Yin, 2014).

***Interviews.*** Interviews are traditionally very common in case study research and one of the most important resources (Hancock & Algozzine, 2012; Yin, 2014). Therefore, the interview process was chosen for this case study in order to gain a deeper understanding, and to absorb knowledge from the perceptions of the various stakeholders. The interviews were critical to the study as they were central in gathering information for the research question. Through semi-structured interviewing, the study extracted insights on and fresh commentary about the perceptions of family engagement in PWR (Yin, 2014). The questions were designed so that the voice of various stakeholders could be heard. By providing flexibility in the structure of the interview, the respondents were able to raise questions and concerns as part of their own voice and perspectives (Brinkmann, 2013).

Comments from the researcher in the interview were minimal and neutral so that participants would not be influenced by statements. However, the researcher built rapport with participants in instances where familiar stories could be shared and understanding of experiences could be expressed. For example, one family member shared how she had multiple roles to juggle as a parent, student and employee. The researcher likewise shared that she was in the same position. This story immediately allowed the participant to feel

at ease and comfortable for the remainder of the interview as could be observed in her openness throughout the interview.

The interviews lasted 45 minutes on average and were conducted mostly in English. Since the school district has a 38% representation of students who identify as Hispanic, the interviews were also offered in Spanish, if needed. It was anticipated that at least one participant would need translation in the interview. The result of this assumption was that one interview was conducted in Spanish.

In the interview, the researcher aimed to follow the topic of inquiry as outlined in the case study protocol and asked questions in a way that was not biased (Yin, 2014). Even further, the researcher was sensitive to reflexivity. Yin (2014) described this as a “mutual and subtle influence” (p.112) between the researcher and participant. The researcher’s perspective unknowingly influences the interviewee’s response which may also unknowingly influence the line of inquiry, thereby coloring the content of the interview (Yin, 2014).

There was an iterative purpose to the interview, with specific goals in mind as the interviewer explored into the participant’s associations, history, and life stories regarding family engagement in PWR in the Constant Spring School District. The various stakeholders were all asked the same questions consistently to ensure that the gathering of information around perceptions were along the same line of inquiry. By asking the same questions in the interviews, reliability was increased in the research, thereby minimizing errors and biases (Yin, 2014).

*Interviews with district administrators.* Interviews with the district stakeholders consisted of the Superintendent and the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness. Table 3 provides demographic data for the district administrators. Each stakeholder agreed to a date and time that was convenient. The interviews took place individually in their respective offices during the spring of 2017. The offices were located at the school district's administrative building. As a small school district, the office of the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness was only steps away from the Superintendent's. Both administrators' offices were laden with college pennants and other postsecondary artifacts; books about school leadership, college and career readiness, and student achievement lined the shelves. Pictures of families and works of art from their children were also proudly displayed around the rooms. For the interview with the Susan (the Superintendent), the researcher sat in an angled position beside Susan on the same side of the conference table. The setting allowed participant and researcher to feel comfortable and that the interview was more of a conversation. For the interview with Linda (Director of PWR), the researcher sat directly across the desk from the participant. Since it was a smaller office space, this position appeared to be the most convenient. Nevertheless, a conversation ensued with no feeling of power dynamics on the part of the researcher.

The interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The researcher used the interview guide and protocol to guide the interview (see Appendix C). Participants were asked to sign a consent form. Both participants signed and agreed to have the interview audio taped and later transcribed. The interview consisted of multiple questions to gain an

in-depth understanding of their perceptions on family engagement and its intersections with postsecondary and workforce readiness (see Appendix C for interview questions).

*Introduction of district administrators.*

*Susan (Superintendent).* Susan, presents a track record of 22 years in education. She was appointed as Superintendent of the Constant Spring School District after the district employed a focused group consisting of parents, residents, teachers and administrators to determine what they wanted to see in the next leader for the school district. While Susan has never served as a superintendent, she has prior experience both as principal and assistant principal accompanied with her levels of academic achievement. In her role as Superintendent, Susan works diligently to lead the school district with an unwavering commitment to its students and the community. Susan's devotion to the school district and to the community was evident in the interview with the researcher but also in the information disclosed by other participants in the study.

*Linda (Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness).* Like many others in the Constant Spring School District, Linda has been with the district for several years. Her work in education spans 16 years, 9 of which is with the current school district. Her role centers on offering relevant and rigorous programming that engage students, implementing and encouraging the use of effective systems that ensure that all students have a plan after they leave high school, and providing multiple pathways for students to obtain their high school diploma. Linda is passionate about education as a continuum and has been investigating ways in which she can implement that process in the school district. She also spoke of the students and families in the district with a continuous sense

of advocacy and often related her own family to the lives and lived experiences of the students and their families.

Table 3

*Demographic Data for District Administrators in the Constant Spring School District*

Administrators (Pseudonym)	Role	Education Level	Age Range	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in Role	Years in Education
Linda	Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness	Master's	35-44	White	9	16
Susan	Superintendent	EdD	45-54	White	2	22

*Interviews with teachers and school principals.* Interviews with the school principals and teachers consisted of a principal from each level of the district, that is, early childhood education, elementary, middle, and high schools. Interviews with teachers were also from three levels within the school district, one from elementary, one from middle, and one from high school. Table 4 provides the demographic data for teachers and principals. Each stakeholder agreed to a date and time that was convenient. The interviews took place individually in their respective offices, conference room, or classroom. Interviews were conducted within normal work hours during the spring of 2017.

The interviews with principals occurred in their offices. In all instances, the researcher sat side by side in an angled position thereby creating a space that was more relaxed. As was the case with the school district administrators, the principals also had many artifacts in their offices, ranging from graduation pictures, colleges, pennants, family photographs, books of varying topics and carved out meeting spots.

Teachers preferred to meet in their classrooms. Though the rooms were larger in these interviews, the researcher and participant sat in a comfortable delegated space that allowed for quiet conversation without being interrupted should a student enter the classroom. The interviews occurred without interruption. The classrooms were not overtly laden with student work or curriculum material. The absence of clutter was obvious and the researcher was surprised by such unique feature in these spaces.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The researcher used the interview guide and protocol to guide the interview (see Appendix C). Participants were asked to sign a consent form. All participants signed and agreed to have the interview audio taped and later transcribed. The interview consisted of multiple questions to gain an in-depth understanding of their perceptions on family engagement and its intersections with postsecondary and workforce readiness (see Appendix C for interview questions).

Table 4

*Demographic Data for Teachers and Principals in the Constant Spring School District*

Participant (Pseudonym)	Role	Education Level	Age Range	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in Role	Years in Education	School Affiliation
Debbie	Teacher	Master's	45-54	White	5	13	Elementary
Bethany	Teacher	Master's	35-45	White	10	12	Middle school
Tina	Teacher	Master's	35-45	White	14	16	High school
Robert	Principal	Master's	45-54	White	1	25	High School, Middle Schools
Christine	Principal	PhD	45-54	White		28	High School
Kim	Principal	Master's	35-44	White	1	16	Elementary
Lisa	Principal/ ECE Director	Master's	35-44	White	3	20	Early Childhood Education

*Introduction of teachers and school principals.*

*Debbie (Teacher).* Debbie is in her first year as an elementary school teacher in the Constant Spring School District and an educator with 13 years of prior experience. In addition, she served as a professional learning coach where she endeavored to provide support to teachers. She explained her beliefs which centered on giving students the tools that they need to be successful in the workforce and all aspects of their lives. As such, Debbie consistently gave consideration in the interview to educating teachers, staff, and families, providing resources, giving students exposure, and connecting academics to real life.

*Bethany (Teacher).* Bethany is a middle school social studies teacher who also previously taught Spanish. She conveyed that being bilingual as a White teacher gave her an added advantage in communicating with students and their families. She believed that her students needed two skills to survive middle school and these were organization and self-control. Bethany expressed that while students may not believe that they needed social studies as a key subject matter in their lives moving forward, it was important for them to exit her classroom knowing how to problem solve, critical think, collaborate and cooperate.

*Tina (Teacher).* Filled with heart almost to the point of tears, Tina explained her commitment to the Constant Spring School District for 16 years. Her responsibilities spanned from program coordinator, teacher, coach, to department chair. Tina insisted throughout the interview on the importance of getting to know students beyond their academics. She believed that her role as a high school math teacher was central to helping



students figure out who they are and who they want to be. Her classes therefore encourage self-awareness, exploration, independence and responsibility.

*Robert (Principal).* Robert is a newer principal to the school district and is tasked with one of the largest campuses which hosts a high school, middle school and a leadership academy. He spent 25 years in several roles in education with his most recent being in the central office as an administrator with a neighboring school district. Prior to his district responsibilities, Robert worked 10 years as a principal. He desired to return to his interaction with students. As such, he accepted the position of principal with the Constant Spring School District. Robert devotes his career to a strong advocacy for students and giving them options to be successful.

*Christine (Principal).* Christine is the principal of the district's alternative high school. She has worked in education for over 28 years and in her current role for more than 16 years. Her presence is well regarded as she has received many accolades for her work with students and families. The school has one of the highest turnouts in parent teacher conferences with almost 100% attendance. In addition, Christine's academic qualifications bring a wide array of experience to the school district with a bachelor degree in Child Development, and graduate degrees in Human Development and Family Studies, and Curriculum Studies. Her role focuses on goal setting and providing support to staff, students and families.

*Kim (Principal).* As principal of one of the district's elementary school, Kim brings 16 years of experience in education to students and families in the district. As an academically qualified principal, she believed in doing small things to eventually impact

the larger vision of the school. For example, she spoke about dressing up as the cartoon character, Wonder Woman, so that she could connect and build relationships with students. As such, Kim's passion to connect with families, build relationships, have fun, and to create welcoming environments rest as her mantra as she carries out her responsibilities on a daily basis.

*Lisa (Principal/ECE Director).* A South African native, Lisa is on the cusp of completing her first year in the Constant Spring School District as Principal and Early Childhood Education Director. Prior to her current role, she was principal of a larger elementary school in a neighboring district. With degrees in Logopedics and Speech Language, Lisa has also given her time to running a group home for children with developmental disabilities, and starting an autism-based preschool. Lisa expressed her passion throughout the interview on building the whole child, incorporating hands-on activities, and learning each student's version of success. As the ECE director, Lisa is known for her connection to the community, and her emphasis on engaging families in various activities in and outside of the ECE campus.

*Interviews with families.* Seven families volunteered to participate in the study. Since family members had multiple students in varying levels of the school district, the researcher was able to obtain perspectives from early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school families. A breakdown of demographic data for the families and the school levels of their students is given in Table 5. A wide representation of families was obtained for the study as it pertains to age, income, gender, education, ethnicity, and type of family. Each participant agreed to a date and time that was convenient. The interviews

took place with individual families on school sites in conference rooms provided, in coffee shops, via Google Hangout, and in homes.

The interview conducted in the home with Maria and Chad also had four of their seven children present. In addition, the researcher had her two children present in the interview. The atmosphere was relaxed and lively with the voices of children as they introduced themselves and immediately immersed in play. The children were not asked any questions but would occasionally interject with comments as they listened to how their family was engaged in their educational journey.

Google Hangout also provided an opportunity for family engagement. Though the interview was remote, the participant (Rebecca) was present in her home and surrounded by family members. The researcher was introduced via screen to the other members in the household, including the beloved cat. The researcher observed that the participant was in a relaxed environment and communicated openly about her perceptions and lived experiences pertaining to family engagement in PWR in the school district.

The interview with Jackie was conducted at a school. The mother had arranged the interview time concurrently with the school's dismissal time. She agreed to do the interview and asked for her son to join. The researcher agreed and commented that her research centered on family engagement. This was simply another form of engagement. The son looked interested throughout the interview as his mother interacted with the researcher. He would occasionally add his interpretations to the questions.

Dawn agreed to be interviewed at the coffee shop where her daughter worked. She indicated that she would need to transport her daughter to work that morning and

later commented that it was an opportune time to see her daughter for a few more minutes out of the day. Other interviews were conducted with only a single member of the household as other family members were at work and school based on the time the interviews were scheduled.

Interviews were conducted on a day and time during the spring of 2017 that was most convenient to the participant. Each interview lasted approximately 35 to 60 minutes. The researcher used the interview guide and protocol to guide the interview (see Appendix C). Participants were asked to sign a consent form. All participants signed and agreed to have the interview audio taped and later transcribed. The interview consisted of multiple questions to gain an in-depth understanding of their perceptions on family engagement and its intersections with postsecondary and workforce readiness (see Appendix C for interview questions).

An interview with one family member was conducted in Spanish. The researcher used the assistance of a certified translator provided by the school district, as the family member was more comfortable with a familiar person. The researcher had an added advantage as she was familiar with Spanish and could comprehend intonations in the interview, as well as determine the relative precision of the interpretation in English. In order to determine if a translator was needed, the invitation was sent in both Spanish and English. The participant indicated that a translator would be needed for the interview. Interview protocols and consent forms were also provided in Spanish. The documents were translated by a state certified instructor and whose first language is Spanish (see appendix B).

Table 5

*Demographic Data for Families in the Constant Spring School District*

Family Pseudonym	Education Level	Age Rg.	Marital Status	Race/Ethnicity	Grade Level of Student(s)	Total Household Income (before taxes)	Number in Household	Additional Tidbit
Maria & Chad	Completed some high school	25-34	Married	Mother Hispanic Father White	Early childhood, Elementary & Middle	\$75,000 - \$99,999	9	Blended Family, mother is bilingual
Jackie	High school graduate	55-64	Married	White	High school	\$75,000 - \$99,999	3	Older daughter completed college
Carmen	High school graduate	25-34	Married	Hispanic	Early childhood & Elementary	Less than \$25,000	5	Speaks primarily Spanish
Matthew	Bachelor's degree	35-44	Married	White	Early childhood & Elementary	\$75,000 - \$99,999	4	Dad does drop-off/pick-up of kids
Dawn	Completed some college	45-54	Single - never married	Black or African American	High school	\$25,000 - \$34,999	3	Immigrated from South Wales
Rebecca	Master's degree	45-54	Married	White	High school	\$150,000 or more	5	Children are adopted
Brenda	Associate's degree	35-44	Married	Hispanic	Early childhood, Elementary & High school	\$150,000 or more	5	Brenda is bilingual. Dad is hardly home due to work.

*Introduction of families.*

*Maria and Chad.* Maria and Chad are a blended household with seven children combined. Maria identifies as Hispanic and is bilingual. Her husband identifies as White. Both were not able to complete high school but were determined to change that path. As such, Maria was enrolled in GED classes while balancing work and a family. Chad felt

that there was significance in volunteering at the early childhood education center and endeavored to balance volunteer hours with his job and home responsibilities. They spoke firmly and passionately about preparing their students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and mentioned the multiple ways in which they were engaged at home to accomplish this goal. On a guided tour of the home, the researcher was shown books, and games that were part of this preparation process. In addition, their students were involved in gardening and raising chickens. Maria and Chad shared the types of chores and responsibilities that they believed were fundamental to their students' development as a person.

*Jackie.* Jackie is a more senior family member than the other participants in this study. She has a daughter over age 30 and a son in high school. Jackie spoke with pride about her daughter who completed college and has a successful career in real estate. Even though Jackie only has a high school diploma, she had high aspirations for her students and spoke of the many sacrifices made as a family to ensure that her students had the opportunities to be prepared for college, life and work. Jackie has worked for more than 15 years in numerous school districts in entry level administrative positions. She advocated that families needed to be involved at the school level in order to be knowledgeable about the education system and the schooling of their students.

*Carmen.* Carmen, a younger mother, had three students in the Constant Spring School District. One student was in preschool while the other two were in elementary school. She spoke primarily Spanish and was a stay-at-home mom. As a way to become more integrated and engaged in the schools, she was taking English classes offered by the

early childhood education center and was very excited about her much-improved understanding of the language. Carmen felt very disconnected from postsecondary areas as she did not have brothers, sisters or any other relative who attended college. She wanted more information on postsecondary options so that she could begin to prepare her students from the very early onset of their schooling.

*Matthew.* A father of three, Matthew had the prime responsibility of drop off and pickup of his children at school. He worked from home which allowed well needed flexibility in balancing this responsibility. His wife, however, did not have this luxury and was therefore not always able to attend school events. Matthew was reserved and guarded in the interview. Nevertheless, he revealed in the conversation a strong advocacy for his students. He spoke of several instances where he had to address the schools regarding the kind of services and supports that he needed for his students.

*Dawn.* Dawn was a single mother of two girls. One student was in her senior year of high school preparing to go off to a prominent college while the other graduated high school the prior year and was employed in a neighborhood coffee shop. Dawn, herself, was in the process of trying to complete a college degree and expressed that this was a challenge as she also worked to support her family. There are other struggles that Dawn mentioned. She re-counted her family experiences of moving from South Wales in the 1960's to the United States and the racism they encountered as a Black family. She talked about being the only black family in high school, the frustrations and the constant advocacy of her mother. Dawn identified with her mother from many years ago as now being that advocate for her students. In spite of these challenges, Dawn was strongly

determined that her students would be presented with equal opportunities to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Rebecca.* Rebecca's family added to the diversity of the study in numerous ways. She had three adopted children, two identified as Black and the third as White. One student had severe learning disabilities and mental health issues while another was identified as gifted and talented. As a family, Rebecca acknowledged that they needed significant support from the school district for their students. Both parents were educators and they believed this was an asset for their family. They were familiar with the education system and were more comfortable with making demands for their students to be successful. Rebecca spoke of the potential of each student in her home equally and firmly believed that they each could succeed in their particular areas.

*Brenda.* Brenda's family represented the higher salary range of families in the study. Their income bracket, however, came with many sacrifices. Brenda works as a teaching assistant for a few hours each week to help out with the family income. She, however, has to balance this with going to college, sporting activities for her students and the various other hats of mother of the household. Her husband is gone four days out of each week for his work as a truck driver and oftentimes, she considers herself a single mother raising three children ranging from early childhood all the way through high school. Brenda is bilingual and believes strongly in the rich cultural heritage she has to offer her students as well as leaving education as their legacy to be successful in work and life.



**Observations.** Observation at school events and tours of school environments were used as an element of triangulation for the research. Direct observation occurred onsite to perceive behaviors or environmental conditions relevant to the study (Yin, 2014). The observations were non-participatory and allowed the researcher to be an outsider, therefore she was able to record data without direct involvement (Creswell, 2013). The data was recorded electronically on the researcher's personal computer with password protection. However, the researcher was flexible with the knowledge that her role, and observation or level of participation during an event could change especially as she became more familiar with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2016). For example, the researcher attended a postsecondary and workforce readiness event but became a participant-observer and interacted with families to gain insider views. This permitted the researcher to establish a relationship with the participants, and find commonalities with them (Merriam, 2016) as a step towards establishing trust. Notes were entered in a field journal following the event. The events that were observed are (a) STEAM night, (b) mock job interviews with opportunity fair, and (c) guided tour of schools.

Several factors were considered in the observations: the physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, conversations, subtle factors (such as symbolic and connotative meaning of words), and the researcher's own behavior (Merriam, 2016). The researcher specifically looked at elements such as interactions between school and district personnel and families at events geared towards engaging families in PWR or supporting students in PWR. The goal was to be able to provide some knowledge of the

context that could be used as reference points in the interviews and throughout the study (Merriam, 2016). Being able to understand the context allowed for a more holistic perspective in the research (Patton, 2015). Additionally, by being on-site in the various settings, the researcher did not have to rely solely on prior information about the setting from written or verbal reports (Patton, 2015) and was able to triangulate the data obtained in the interviews. The observations were compared and contrasted with interview data and document review to present a comprehensive picture of family engagement in PWR in the Constant Spring School District. Chapter Five will further discuss these findings.

***Document review.*** Documentary information included the school district's Family Handbook, brochures, newsletters, handouts on PWR, the district's Strategic Plan, the PWR Strategic Plan, the district's website, and each school's website on both the computer and phone application versions. These artifacts were reviewed to corroborate the purpose of the research study. The specific purpose for which the documents were written was considered for bias and accuracy (Yin, 2014). The researcher therefore used a consistent protocol to review documents. Based on the purpose of the research, the factors that were considered were:

1. The original purpose of the document.
2. Language – was the document available in other languages beside English?
3. Terminologies – was there reference to *parents* or *families*?
4. Was the document current or outdated?
5. Was the document focused on PWR?

6. Was the document connected to the larger vision of the district's Strategic Plan and focused on family engagement in PWR?

A single source of data collection would make it challenging to provide evidence that builds trust and accuracy about the topic being explored. The strength of a case study rests in its complexity, and the use of multiple sources of evidence to obtain multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2016; Yin, 2014). Therefore, the use of multiple sources to conduct this study allowed the researcher to gather a broader overview of the topic. Historical, attitudinal and behavioral evidence were aimed at corroborating the same phenomenon (Yin, 2014). The advantage of using multiple sources of evidence was to develop converging lines of inquiry and enhance the ability to find conclusions that were more convincing (Yin, 2014). Rossman and Rallis (2016) explain that using multiple sources also allows the reader to interpret and decide the applicability of the case learnings to another setting.

### **Confidentiality**

The researcher conducted the study with care and sensitivity by protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants (Yin, 2014). The researcher approached the participants with respect and dignity and provided assurance that all information would be non-identifiable. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, along with the study procedures, that the interview would be recorded and transcribed, and that the recorded session would be secured with a passcode on the electronic device which was used. The participants were also informed that taking part in the study was not mandatory and withdrawal could occur at any time without penalty. Participants were

asked if they were willing to be contacted for follow-up to review the emerging themes as well as check for accuracy in the data. This is referred to as member checking so that they could judge the accuracy and credibility of the accounts (Creswell, 2013). Participants were asked to inform the researcher of any quotes or other results with which they did not agree. The informed consent form addressed all these aspects of confidentiality for the participants (see Appendix B). All participants received a copy of the informed consent form for their records.

The interviews with the participants were conducted in a space that was comfortable and private for the participants. Designated offices at the school and district office were presented as options. Some participants chose these spaces. Others chose to meet in a coffee shop or in their homes. The settings were neutral and comfortable according to the participant's needs. There were no concerns regarding trust as the information asked was general, and did not impact a vulnerable population negatively by asking for any identifiable information. No children were interviewed in the study even if they were present at the interview. There were no ethical concerns because consent was obtained from adult participants.

### **Data Analysis**

The case study analysis was guided by the theoretical proposition that led to the study (Yin, 2014). By keeping the research question as the central focus, the researcher was able to concentrate on the perceptions of the various stakeholders regarding family engagement in PWR. Guidelines in qualitative research suggest that the research question should remain at the forefront of the study in order to manage the wealth of information

that emerges as well as for understanding (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). More specifically, and in a more practical sense, Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) suggest keeping a copy of the research questions, goals of the study, theoretical framework, and any other major issues on a single page at all times. This informs the purpose of the research, and in turn informs the analysis (Patton, 2015). The researcher therefore used these suggestions as guidelines in the interview process to ensure the purpose of the research was followed with integrity.

There were several steps in the analysis of the data, as the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to represent the data at a greater level of abstraction and reasoning (Creswell, 2013). Rossman and Rallis (2016) present a generic process for the analysis of data: organizing the data, becoming familiar with the data, generating themes, coding the data, interpreting, searching for alternative interpretations, and finally, writing the report.

**Organizing the data.** The researcher used several methods to keep data organized throughout the collection process. To begin, an Excel spreadsheet was used for tracking interviews, such as name of participant, and time of the interview (see Appendix D for sample). After each interview was completed, the researcher immediately recorded field notes on the Preliminary Interview Summary Form (see Appendix E). These field notes were typed up, time stamped with place and date of interview, and participants were given a pseudonym (see Appendix E for sample Preliminary Interview Summary Form). The field notes documents were saved individually and were organized according to the role of participant on the researcher's personal computer with password protection. A review of the notes occurred immediately after the interview or observation in order to

prepare the notes for further analysis. As such, the researcher was able to identify and capitalize on emerging themes, nuances, feelings, and attitudes by remaining current and intimate with the data.

Recorded interviews were organized with pseudonym of interviewee, date, time and place on a secure and password protected device. Documents that were reviewed were arranged according to where they were obtained, from whom, date of preparation, and purpose.

**Familiarizing with the data.** Transcription of the interviews were completed within 24 to 72 hours of the interview to maximize the accuracy of, and intimacy with the data. The interviews were transcribed verbatim to a Word document. The transcripts were read and re-read in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content while the researcher immersed herself into the data. The researcher also conducted a secondary reading of the final transcripts while listening to the interviews so that she could be aware of intonations, pauses, and emphases. Any recollection of environment and body language was noted on the transcripts as the researcher immersed in the data and analyzed the transcriptions.

The researcher kept a journal to log observations and tracked any possible emotions that occurred throughout the research. This was particularly important for the researcher as she interviewed families and recognized the need to check for biases from her own perspective as a parent. Whether it is keeping a journaling, or making an analytic memo, recording and tracking in qualitative research are considered part of the course of analysis provided it does not interfere with the openness of the naturalistic inquiry in the

data collection phase (Patton, 2015). The need to examine any biases that may arise in the process is consistent with qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The taking of notes also helped to contextualize participant interactions, conflicts, attitudes, and behaviors which were then compared to the themes that emerged in the data and literature. By immersing in the data, logging observations, checking for biases, and contextualizing the interactions of participants, the researcher became more familiar and intimate with the data.

**Generating categories and themes.** A qualitative data analysis software, Dedoose, was used to organize and manage the data. The software assisted in keeping the data organized. The researcher was the primary coder of the data and the primary tool of analysis. The researcher began by reading through the printed paper transcripts for each interview, then significant statements that pertained to the research questions were extracted and meanings formulated. The expressed meanings were sorted into categories and themes using the literature review as a guideline. The difference between a category and a theme is that the category provided direction for gathering data while the theme emerged as a sentence, word or phrase that described the subtler and tacit processes (Rossman & Rallis, 2016).

**Coding.** “Coding is the formal representation of analytic thinking” (Rossman & Rallis, 2016, p. 245). This means that the researcher devoted meticulous attention to the data so that she could symbolically assign summative, salient or evocative attributes to the data (Saldaña, 2013). The coding of the data was supported through the continuing use of the computer assisted software, Dedoose. The software does not allow for automation in generating categories and themes from the inputted files, therefore the

researcher was the prime coder of the data. The researcher looked for the emergence of meaningful patterns, insights and concepts (Yin, 2014), as well as what words or phrases elaborated these concepts (Rossman & Rallis, 2016).

The data was coded more than once to continuously link the data to the conceptual issue, to stimulate insights, and to refine categories (Rossman & Rallis, 2016; Saldaña, 2013). As recommended by Saldaña (2013), the first stage of coding was done manually on hard copy printouts of each interview. As a novice coder, the researcher recognized the need to gain control and ownership of the study by burrowing through the data manually. The first cycle coding method used for the interviews was Structural Coding (Saldaña, 2013). Structural Coding acted as a labeling and indexing device where the researcher's line of inquiry related to the research question and the theoretical framework (Saldaña, 2013). In this first cycle, the coding of the data was categorized at the basic level for further analysis. The core content of the interviews and observations were examined to determine what was significant (Patton, 2015).

The researcher then moved to a second cycle of coding. In this stage, axial coding was utilized. Axial coding was appropriate because of the wide variety of data that was collected from interviews, observations and documents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998; Saldaña, 2013). Axial coding is the phase where categories become distinct, these are refined, and the relationships among them are examined systematically (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Benaquisto, 2008). As the researcher looked across all forms of data, theoretical sampling was linked and used to further understand the relationship between categories and themes. The interview questions and theoretical framework were used in



this cycle to further refine the categories and themes. Figure 4 is a synopsis of the relationship between the interview questions, the categories and themes that emerged throughout the study, and the theoretical framework.

**Figure 4.** The Relationship of Categories and Themes

The Relationship of Interview Questions to The Theoretical Framework and to Categories and Themes Generated in the Coding Process						
Interview Questions	Categories Generated in Coding	Themes Generated in Coding	Sub-themes Generated in Coding	Theoretical Framework		
				Factors influencing Family Engagement	Forms of Family Engagement	Co-construction of Engagement
1) With which phrase are you more familiar, parent involvement or family engagement? a. What does the phrase "parent involvement" mean to you? b. What does the phrase family engagement mean to you?	Category 1 - Perception of Family Engagement versus Parent Involvement	Activity-based		X	X	
		Value-based		X	X	X
		Whole-family-based		X	X	
		Partnership-based		X	X	X
2) In what ways have you seen or been a part of family engagement at the school or district? a. How do you want family engagement to be different in the school or district?		Support-based		X	X	X
3) What are your hopes and dreams for your child's/students' educational future? a. Describe some ways that you are engaged with your child's education at home? b. Describe some ways that you are engaged with your child's/students' education at school?	Category 2 - Hopes and Dreams	Feel Welcomed		X		X
		Prepared for the World				X
		Doors of Opportunities		X		X
		Be Somebody				X
3c. What are some of the barriers that prevent you from being engaged?	Category 3 - Barriers to Family	Time and Work		X		
		Communication to Families		X		X
		Self-efficacy		X		X
4) How do you encourage and prepare your child to go to college? 5) What are the postsecondary and workforce readiness programs, interventions offered in the school/district of which you are aware? a. How do you get information on these programs? b. Do you receive communication in a language you understand? c. What is the best way to communicate this information to you? d. Do you receive feedback about your children and what specific feedback do you receive? 6) How do you encourage and prepare your child to be prepared for work/employment after high school?	Category 4 - Preparation for PWR	Awareness of Programs		X		X
		Skills Needed	Respeto	X		X
			21st Century Skills	X		X
		Funds of Knowledge		X	X	X
8) What role do you feel that families plays in postsecondary and workforce readiness? 9) What role do you feel that teachers play in postsecondary and workforce readiness? 10) What role do you feel that principals play in postsecondary and workforce readiness? 11) What role do you feel that the district plays in postsecondary and workforce readiness?	Category 5 - Role of Stakeholders	Provide Support		X	X	X
		Believe in Students		X	X	X
		Set the Culture		X	X	X

*Figure 4.* The Relationship of Categories and Themes. This figure illustrates the categories and themes generated in the coding process and their relationship to the interview questions and theoretical framework used to guide the study.

The researcher then transitioned to electronic coding. The manual coding was very important as the methods of structured coding, and axial coding facilitated the development of categories which the researcher could enter into Dedoose as a starting point. She entered all interview transcripts in the electronic software, along with the demographic data for each participant. The interview transcripts for each participant were linked to the applicable demographic sheet. The researcher transitioned again through several reiterations of categories and themes as she worked through the interview transcriptions, field notes, documents, and observations notes. Saldaña (2013) suggests coding and recoding when working with multiple participants, and coding contrasting data. As such, throughout the process, the researcher continuously looked for convergent and divergent perceptions regarding family engagement in PWR.

**Interpretation and finding alternative understanding.** Interpreting the data involves moving from a thematic analysis to attaching significance, offering explanations, making inferences, and making sense of the findings (Patton, 2015). While the computer software, Dedoose, was helpful in managing the data and coding, the researcher was key in the analytic and interpretive framework of the data. Narrowing the data was very challenging and demanded a much higher level of integration (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). The researcher had to pay attention to the language used by each participant as she immersed in deep reflections on the emerging patterns and meanings of the experiences of her participants (Saldaña, 2013).

As the information from the interviews was pulled together into a reflective dialogue (Rossman & Rallis, 2016), the researcher did not ignore conflicts in the

narratives and descriptions, and therefore was open to multiple interpretations (Brinkmann, 2013). The researcher was aware that other plausible explanations were needed and therefore demonstrated logical accounts that were grounded in the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2016).

Validation of the findings was sought from the research participants, observations, and documents, and compared to the researcher's results. Rossman & Rallis (2016) remark that alternative understanding is not a “solo enterprise” (p. 248), so the researcher sought corroboration of the data with other resources. The literature review and theoretical framework were also used to confirm or refute the findings of the research. These will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

The analytic process was iterative until a point of theoretical saturation was achieved. A researcher never really completes collecting data. However, the researcher felt comfortable that theoretical saturation was achieved when: (a) there was a clear description from the informants about family engagement in PWR; (b) the researcher had an understanding of how the lives of the participants informed the research question and member checking was complete as it related to the emerging themes; and (c) there were no new emerging themes.

**Writing the report.** There is no universally accepted format of writing up a case study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006), and it is not separate and apart from the analytic process (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). Nevertheless, the researcher chose a thematic presentation to report the findings in Chapter Five. The thematic approach allowed the researcher to present the findings of the study into a description of the phenomenon that

illuminates the multiple meanings that emerged from the activities and experiences throughout the research (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). The findings are a synthesis after the data passed through the various stages of analysis. The researcher kept the audience in mind as the report was written, and therefore provided thick descriptions that will allow the audience to understand how her work linked to the larger research literature (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

### **Reliability and Validity (Credibility, Dependability, Transferability and Trustworthiness)**

Reliability and validity look different in a case study than in other research methods in the social sciences. In qualitative research, some of the terms used for reliability as essential criteria for quality are credibility, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For validity, the trustworthiness and establishing confidence in the data speak to the rigor carried out by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In general, the more important question in qualitative research is whether the results are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2016), and the researcher has taken steps to minimize errors and biases in the study (Yin, 2014). Therefore, in qualitative research, if the findings of the study are consistent with the data presented, then the study is often considered to be dependable and trustworthy (Merriam, 2016).

Strategies that were used to ensure the dependability of the data were triangulation, member checking, the researcher's position (reflexivity), the audit trail, and the relationship of the data to the theoretical framework. Triangulation of the data occurred with multiple sources of data where the researcher compared and cross-checked

the data collected from observations, interviews, and documents. Triangulation of the data led to improved analysis as multiple methods were used leading to more valid, reliable and diverse constructions of realities (Golafshani, 2003). Although the triangulation of data was threatened by possible bias from the researcher, efforts were made to ensure the trustworthiness of the data by providing rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon, keeping extensive field notes, and journaling. As it relates to member checking, the researcher solicited feedback from participants on emerging findings to see if they agreed with the interpretations. The goal was to ensure that the participants recognized their experiences in the interpretation and if not, they had the opportunity to provide suggestions that better captured their perspectives and would be more compelling and convincing (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2016). There were two ways in which member checking was attained. Throughout the interview process, the researcher checked with participants on responses they provided by following up with questions for clarification, restating what the researcher understood or interpreted from responses. Secondly, each participant received a copy of the interview transcript with a summary of the initial findings. The interview transcript and summary of the initial findings for the interview that was conducted in Spanish were provided in Spanish and English to the participant. The researcher's contact information was provided for follow-up and feedback. The researcher did not receive any feedback to the contrary.

While there may be risks associated with suggestions from participants, the threat to the validity of the data is the researcher imposing her own meaning rather than understanding the perspectives of her participants (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, the

researcher bracketed her own framework and assumptions in the reflexive process. The researcher kept a reflection journal (audit trail) which tracked her interactions with the data, issues, questions, ideas, and interpretations. This allowed the researcher to demonstrate and build confidence in the journey towards her findings (Merriam, 2016).

The theoretical framework was also used to guide the research. The researcher considered the background and data in the literature review which led to the theoretical framework. The framework also enhanced the rich, thick descriptions in the findings as it reflected the constructs, language, and theories that structured the research (Merriam, 2016). The rich, thick description will permit others reading the study to decide on the transferability based on shared characteristics (Creswell, 2013).

### **Role of the Researcher**

**Figure 5.** The Researcher with Her Birth Family.



*Figure 5.* The Researcher with Her Birth Family. This figure illustrates the researcher posing for a family picture after church. She is captured with mother, father, brothers and younger sister.

The researcher reflected on her personal, and lived experiences that added to the study. As a woman of color, a first-generation graduate of bachelors' and masters' degrees, a mother with two children, and an Afro Caribbean living in a foreign country, her expertise and experiences allowed her to identify, interpret, and understand the lived experiences and perceptions gained throughout the study from her participants. The researcher further recognized that her own family background, her funds of knowledge, and her various identities contributed to connecting with the participants. She was able to ask why questions thereby capturing the unique voices of her participants with details that could not be portrayed in a survey or quantitative study. The researcher kept the photograph represented in Figure 5 as a reminder to the purpose of the study and the potential impact of her work. In the nature of artistic freedom and as a symbol of her story, the researcher captured her story in the following narrative with purposeful right alignment:

He sat quietly across the table  
For the first time  
Stories of our family history unfolded  
The words *poor, adopted, slave, bond child* and *free*  
*No food, shame, distress*  
Rang heavily in my ear  
I was silent  
Eyes filled with watery epistles  
Blurred future thoughts

I was centered in the present  
My heart  
Overwhelmed with questions  
Filled with sympathy  
Empathy evaded me  
These are shoes I could never fill  
A path I would never walk  
It was not my journey  
Yet it was  
A father adopted  
A father who was fartherless  
A father skirting the edges of educational accomplishments  
A mother leaving home  
A child herself in the city  
Seeking a better life  
A father leaving home  
Barely a man in the city  
Seeking a better life  
Joined in mind and heart  
They vowed a better life for their children  
Here I am!  
We were not rich, we were not poor, we had enough



A working father, a stay at home mother

They sacrificed

Father, never present at school

Yet, he was our engaged dad

Father, never present for events

Yet, he was our engaged dad

Engaged!

A shoulder when we needed to cry

A prayer when we lost direction

A listening ear when we had no words

He was our engaged dad

Here I am!

A woman of color

A kaleidoscope of history

A melting pot of cultures

Standing on the periphery

Standing in the center

I found my voice

I found my identity

The narrative was a constant point of reflection which enabled the researcher to realize experiences, to hear nuances in the conversations, and to understand cultural backgrounds from the lens of a woman of color, first-generation college graduate,

mother, family history, and lessons learned from cultural differences in Jamaica and the United States. The study was therefore enhanced from a unique perspective because of the funds of knowledge and lived experiences of the researcher. For example, all teachers and administrators identified as White in the current study. In conversations with these participants, the researcher was able to recognize bias towards underrepresented populations. As a Black woman, herself, the researcher was able to connect with families who also identified as Black or Hispanic. As one who migrated to the United States, the researcher was also able to identify with the lived experiences of participants who did the same. They willingly shared struggles they had regarding cultural differences and racial tensions in the school district.

In order to minimize potential bias in the research around these experiences, the researcher was proactive in utilizing protocols for data collection and analysis. The process of triangulation assisted in this measure of control. In addition, it was vital that some level of neutrality was maintained in the interview process. The researcher was cognizant of not inserting her beliefs and values in the process, but at the same time, recognized that her beliefs and values contributed to the strength of the study.

### **Limitations**

As with any qualitative research, there is the possibility for researcher bias. Since it was difficult to eliminate the variances in values and expectations that the researcher brought to the study, the researcher considered how her values and expectations could influence the study (Maxwell, 2013). As such, the researcher recognized the potential bias and limitation in this research due to the fact that the researcher had previously

completed an internship in the area of postsecondary and workforce readiness in the Constant Spring School District. The researcher, therefore, had a prior relationship with the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness, and had some interactions with the Superintendent prior to starting this research. However, this relationship also gave the researcher access to the school district to conduct the study.

As this research is a case study, the focus is limited to the context of a single suburban school district. The study was conducted with only family participants who volunteered, and who were related to students attending the schools in the district. These were the only perceptions that were included in the study. Therefore, the perspectives of other families were not included in the study. In addition, since the researcher obtained a representative sample of families based on the demographic of the school district, there was unequal representation in grade levels. With the seven families who volunteered, they had students across multiple grade levels. The middle schools were the least represented with the majority of families having students in the early childhood, elementary, and high school grades. Table 5 shows the breakdown of families and the school levels with which their students were associated.

Another limitation was that the study took place in a constrained time frame. This did not allow for longitudinal data to determine if the perceptions of participants changed over time. The researcher had to work with the availability of events that were applicable to the study and that occurred within the timeframe of the study. Lastly, even though family engagement is linked to student achievement, this study did not directly tie the

outcomes of family engagement to postsecondary and workforce readiness due to the time constraints.

### **Organization of Study**

The study was conducted over a six-month period. Upon the completion of a proposal hearing, IRB approval was submitted to the Constant Spring School District and to the university's IRB. Following approval from both, the researcher conducted interviews first with administrators in the school district such as the Superintendent and the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness. This allowed the researcher to develop confidence with the interview process. Interviews were then conducted with principals, teachers, and families. Data was transcribed within 24-72 hours after each interview.

Field notes were kept by the researcher throughout the process. Observations of meetings and events occurred throughout the research period as these events were scheduled at various times. The document review also occurred throughout the study. Interviews, observations, and document review took place over of a four-month period. The researcher then analyzed the data and wrote up the findings after collecting all data for the study. The final research findings were presented in an Oral Defense.

## Chapter Five: Findings

*“There are all sorts of different families .... Some families have one mommy, some families have one daddy, or two families. And some children live with their uncle or aunt. Some live with their grandparents, and some children live with foster parents. And some live in separate homes, in separate neighborhoods, in different areas of the country – and they may not see each other for days, or weeks, months...even years at a time. But if there’s love, dear...those are the ties that bind, and you’ll have a family in your heart, forever.”*

—Mrs. Doubtfire, 1993

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions that families, school and district administrators, as well as teachers have about family engagement in PWR. It was an attempt to learn more, and understand each stakeholder’s potential to impact PWR as part of a collaborative partnership. Therefore, the research question at the forefront of the study was, “What are the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in a suburban school district?” The research question served as a guide in the collection of data and the analysis of the study.

This Chapter presents the findings for the instrumental case study that explored family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in a suburban school district. More specifically, the various stakeholders included in the study were family members, the Superintendent, the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness,

principals, and teachers. These individuals provided further insight into their understanding of family engagement and how they prepare their students for postsecondary pursuits. Individual interviews were conducted with all participants. A total of 16 semi-structured interviews were completed. The interview questions (see Appendix C) were replicated, however, the participants responded from their own personal perceptions and experiences based on their roles.

Data collection for this study not only utilized semi-structured interviews, but the study drew on other sources of information such as observations and document review. All sources contributed to a rich and in-depth understanding of family engagement in PWR. The researcher was able to identify shared or contradictory values, visions, and conditions around family engagement in PWR in the Constant Spring School District. As such, this chapter presents data that was collected over a three-month period. Data from the interviews, document review, and observations allowed the researcher to illustrate the theoretical framework, the Model of Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness, thereby identifying factors affecting family engagement in PWR, forms of family engagement, barriers to family engagement in PWR, and the roles that each stakeholder played in family engagement as a co-constructive process.

This chapter begins with a thematic presentation of the interviews conducted with all stakeholders. In-depth narratives are provided to illustrate the perceptions, attitudes, and values of the participants. The researcher discusses these narratives through five main categories along with themes and sub-themes that emerged. The five main categories are: (a) perception of family engagement versus parent involvement, (b) hopes

and dreams, (c) barriers to family engagement, (d) preparation for PWR, and (e) roles of stakeholders. The chapter progresses to the observational analysis where descriptions are given for three activities that were observed. The main activities are: (a) STEAM night, (b) mock job interviews and opportunity fair, and (c) school environments. Document analysis will be the final form of data collection that will be described. The chapter then triangulates the findings in the interviews with the observations conducted and documents reviewed. The final section of this chapter provides a summary of the findings.

### **Category One: Perception of Family Engagement Versus Parent Involvement**

As the researcher questioned participants about their familiarity with the terms *parent involvement* and *family engagement* and their interpretations of what these terms meant, most participants seemed disconcerted that there might be a difference between the two. Only four participants were familiar with both phrases, three of whom were families. The more frequently used term was *parent involvement*, especially among administrators and teachers. In a seemingly eye-opening moment, Susan, the Superintendent, responded:

I think probably parent involvement is the one that we use more. But I'm intrigued and understand the difference and the nuance-- and it's not even the nuance, but there is significant implication when you look at it in terms of family engagement. And so, we do talk a lot about parent involvement, but I think we are always striving for family engagement.

What she expressed became a general consensus in the interviews with school and district stakeholders. They consistently expressed a preference for the term family engagement. Linda, the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness, summed up these thoughts when she explained:

I prefer the term family engagement. I think they are kind of used as synonyms. I mean I think we use them interchangeably. But I prefer family engagement because I feel like it's more active in terms of how families would participate in their kid's education.

For families who were more familiar with the term parent involvement, their definition of what this meant aligned closely with family engagement as explained in the literature review. Matthew, a family member with two younger students, one in early childhood and the other in elementary, explained that he took his children to the museums and on family trips in other parts of the United States. He affirmed the idea that all things done with his children were considered as engagement. He stated his interpretation in these words: "Participating with your student in the events at their school. Participating in doing things with them on a daily basis, homework and other projects and other things that come up."

Considering the variances in perceptions from the different stakeholders, the researcher further prompted what the terms meant to each stakeholder. There are five themes that emerged from their responses. The next section presents the findings on these themes.



**Activity-based.** All stakeholders shared the perspective that family engagement was *activity-based*. These activities involved attending parent teacher conferences, helping with homework, attending other events at schools, but also included activities outside of the school environment. Matthew, for example, viewed giving his students life experiences such as taking them on trips and to museums as family engagement. His “larger than school” view was shared by most families as they too expressed neighborhood walks, meal times, reading, planting gardens, and teaching students values and responsibilities as their perception of family engagement in preparing their students for the future. Dawn, a single mom of two girls, expressed her activities in the following way:

...but I am engaged with my children and their learning, and whatever they need to make high school an awesome experience, to continue to build their self-esteem, to know that they are awesome people within the Constant Spring community, and that they have things to offer. The engagement at home is real, and it's all the time. It's while I'm cooking. It's while I'm cleaning. It's while I'm running you from here to there. It's always talking about them, and relationships, and how are things, and what can we talk about, and what can I do to show you that I want you to be a great part of the Constant Spring community because you're living it right now. I mean, anything I can do. It's talks on the phone in the evening with teachers when the kids are having problems. It's talking with parents about what is your child going to do in this instance, or how is your child going to dress for whatever. I just feel I do what I can. I want the girls-- and I think another

thing that I'm so adamant about is because it's just me and the girls, that I like to make sure that everything is covered for them, "Am I not good enough for this? Do you need to call Uncle John (*pseudonym*) to have a man in this instance?" I just try to make sure that everybody's okay. And that everybody's got all their ducks in a line, and is there anything I can do to help keep them there.

Dawn was proud of the way she was engaged. From this rich description, it was evident that *activity-based* meant more than what was happening at school or attending an event or meeting in the academic setting. It was noticeable, however, that teachers and school administrators tended to view family engagement as more school-centric. There was not necessarily an emphasis on families volunteering for school activities, but rather that they were visible and present in the school environment or doing activities related to academics. Kim, the elementary principal stated:

I think the first thing that comes to mind is participation in their child's education. So they're present in the school, whether that means they can drop off and pick up and come in and feel welcome in the school, or be part of a parent group, or come to—we do some open houses and parent nights, we call them actually family nights, a couple times a year.

In the same manner, Bethany, the middle school teacher explained:

It means that the parents are stakeholders in the child's education, that they know in middle school, they know what's going on. If I say, "What does your kid have for language arts," that they know. If they're checking grades, if they're in communication with teachers, if they show up for concerts, or award ceremonies,

or parent-teacher conferences, or graduation. Just that parents are engaged and involved in what's going on at school. If there's a behavior situation that we can get a hold of parents, that parents are willing to come in for meetings or whatever it is.

Essentially, teachers and administrators had a more focused response on homework, communication with the school, and showing up for events. Families differed in their perception and had a conceivably holistic approach to kinds of activities that constituted as engagement.

**Value-based.** Family engagement was seen as *value-based* throughout the study. Being *value-based* referred to the types of cultural, social or emotional beliefs and attitudes that stakeholders felt they were entrusting to students and that were important as part of family engagement in PWR. Families strongly shared this *value-based* sentiment as they spoke consistently about the values they were passing on to their students. Simply giving their students the opportunity to go to school was seen as a value. Brenda, a family member with three students in the school district, expressed that while she may be helping with homework, the more *activity-based* component, she was leaving education as a legacy for her children, the *value-based* element:

It's a lot more involved than that. It's getting them ready for kindergarten, it's getting them ready to succeed from day one. So with him, I'm reading to him, I'm working with him, the letters and sounds. I even make him do the A, B, C's. 'Oh, do I use the tablet?' 'Ok, go write your name and do the A, B, C's.' And then he goes and writes his name, first his last name and then he comes back:

‘Ok, mom. Here are my ‘A, B, C’s and here is my name.’ ‘Ok, now you can go use the tablet.’ So, I try to at least do that for them. So, like I said, if I don’t leave them money, then I leave them education... For me, education is the number one priority in my kids’ life. That is my passing to them so I have to really focus on what they’re learning, I have to focus on what they’re taking with them, because for me that is my inheritance, so I have to make sure that they’re doing it the right way, they’re getting everything they need in order for me to say: ‘I’ve done my job.’

Other values that families talked about were: teaching their students respect, honesty, how to self-advocate, and helping with their self-awareness and social-emotional development. Families spoke about how much they were engaged on a daily basis with their children in these ways.

In contrast, it was intriguing that these values were never mentioned in the interviews with teachers and administrators with the exception of the Superintendent. Even when prodded about their perceptions of what family engagement looked like at home, the responses centered on activities such as homework, being knowledgeable about what was going on at school, being available when contacted by the school, and/or being on the school advisory committee (SAC).

**Whole-family-based.** Contrary to what is perceived in the literature, there is acknowledgement from administrators and teachers that family extends beyond mother and father. Though administrators and teachers kept mentioning the word *parent* throughout the interviews, there was recognition that supporting the educational journey

and preparing students for PWR was not always done through the immediate relationship of a mother or father. Lisa, the Early Childhood Education Director and Principal, explained quite assertively:

First and foremost, family is not always parents.... I have a ton who are being raised by aunts and uncles or grandparents or people who are very much involved in their lives but who are not necessarily biological parents.

This important recognition that family was *whole-family-based* continued into how teachers supported and related to students. Tina, a teacher at one of the secondary schools, gets excited and embraces the opportunity to meet with families during parent teacher conferences. However, she has recognized that some students have others in the picture who are not biological mother or father but who care deeply about the educational journey of their students, and so she encourages them to:

“Bring somebody that cares about your future.” I always ask my kids to come in with somebody who cares about their future, somebody who can help keep them on track, somebody who can help check in with them. Because it isn’t always a parent or guardian. Maybe it’s your best friend. Maybe it’s the one person that you live with because they’re the only person that you seem to have a relationship with right now. So, I just always say, “Bring somebody that cares about your education, who cares about your future.” So that way, I can be like, “Hey, Eric. How’s classes going?” And they’re like, “They suck. I’m not coming.” And I go, “What does your friend, so and so, Susie think about this?” And it’s like, “Do I need to call Susie? Because Susie seems really happy to help me push you.” And

they're like, "No, no, no." Just somebody to help remind them or push them. So that's what I do.

Families, on the other hand, had a more naturalistic language and expectation that the whole family was engaged in the process and that definition of family was fluid for them. Families who identified as Hispanic, especially, had communal expressions when speaking about family engagement. Carmen, for example, said: "Every family member is involved in the education of their children" (translated). Rebecca, a family member with three adopted children, was very clear in her opinion that engagement incorporates all persons supporting the student as she explained in the following way:

Family engagement is, I believe, a more connected way of supporting the student through their education and it involves all of the primary and significant numbers of that student's family, that really helps support that student's education regardless of whether it's the student's parents or legal guardians. It could be grandparents, it could be aunts and uncles, it could be a very, very close family friend that's considered a member of the family. But it's people that are significant members of that child's life beyond just the parents or legal guardians.

It was significant that while teachers and administrators had some acknowledgement or understanding that family engagement was more than mother or father, the use of the word *parents* was still dominant in the vocabulary used throughout the interviews. The researcher was very intentional about using the word *family* when asking questions or in follow-up statements. Nevertheless, the responses would be returned using the terms *parent* or *parents*.

**Partnership-based.** Having a *partnership-based* relationship between families and school was the fourth theme that emerged in this category. All stakeholders at some point throughout the interview would refer to family engagement in PWR as a partnership. Even more so, as stakeholders reflected on the term *engagement*, they explained that the term had a more *partnership-based* approach. Linda, the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness shared:

...Whereas engagement, there's an active part of it where the families are contributing and providing feedback. It's more of a partnership... And many of the things that the-- in the context the PWR world, we try to provide opportunities for families to work alongside their kids in this kind of PWR process.

One of the high schools demonstrates how the school works alongside with the students and families in PWR. The school has a unique system in place called a family teacher. The basic concept is that this family teacher has a group of students the entire time that group attends the school and the family teacher helps those students matriculate through to graduation. The family teacher does advising and regular check-ins with these students. They were uniquely positioned as having full awareness of how these students are doing in all their classes. In addition, these family teachers make connections to home via phone calls or email communication. At parent teacher conferences, the families would see this one family teacher to get an update on their students in all areas. The family teacher allows the families to have a go-to partner at the school, but also to build core relationships with the students and their families. Reports from the principal at the school indicated that this strategy was highly effective since the response to parent

teacher conferences was close to a 100% turnout. Other indications were seen in the surveys sent to families who consistently had glowing remarks about being able to connect with family teachers.

As a *partnership-based* approach, school administrators also envisioned that families would have more decision-making power, and would take the lead in creating programs or events. Lisa, the Early Childhood Education Director and Principal, remarked:

...I see the parents taking a much stronger lead in what they're doing and having true decision-making power, having a true way of saying: 'I am involved in the system and I'm part of it.'

Families also wanted a relationship with the schools that acknowledged them as part of the process but that was also based on mutual respect and trust. However, they were sometimes as engaged as they wanted to be. Juggling multiple jobs or responsibilities prevented them from taking these lead roles in activities as envisioned by administrators. A common refrain from the families was that they had a strong desire to see their students succeed and wanted to share this responsibility with the schools. Families, in their own respect, felt that they could support what was happening at school if they knew and understood what was happening with their students. Brenda emphatically shared: "We're supposed to be a team. We're a team. So, if there's something that I'm not doing correctly, I would expect the principal or teacher or advisor to tell me."



While there is this strong sense from families that they want to partner with the schools, there is also the feeling of exclusion. Dawn, a single mom who felt out of the loop in this partnership, stated, “I don’t think we get enough of a chance as parents in the Constant Spring School District to be a part of the community.” Matthew talked about this exclusion when he explained that opportunities to be partners in the educational celebrations were disappearing in the school district. With a sense of frustration, he looked at the researcher and said, “No chance for the parents to come and say, ‘Great job!’ ...and it seems to be opportunities for engagement that are disappearing.”

**Support-based.** The final theme is that family engagement was seen as *support-based*. The previous theme of *partnership-based* family engagement predicated that support would be embedded in that framework. Administrators perceived that true family engagement would be exercised in a way that supported families, because in supporting families, they were, by extension, supporting the success of students. Christine’s statement (a high school Principal) shows agreement with this finding: “how can I use the words to put my words around it? - how to support parents in supporting their student’s success.”

Susan, the Superintendent, talked about the resources needed for students to successfully prepare for PWR. She found that support for families was integral to the success of students, but wrestled with how to support families in this process:

So how do we help support that family and that student...-- maybe there’s other ways they can gain those resources, so that student can continue with their education and then create their own future based upon that. As opposed to just,

“Okay, this is where we default back to again.” And I don’t want this to come across that I’m casting any aspersions on any families at all, because people do what they have to do. And I get that completely. But I think anything that we can do to create pathways and help families support kids in meeting their hopes and dreams, that’s part of our work too. Absolutely.

Families expressed more specifically what support looked like for them as part of family engagement in PWR. Brenda asked for classes on time management and helping her to get organized, while Dawn asked for the district to be more aware on how to handle issues of equity in relation to race. Dawn, who identified as Black, expressed that she wanted her students to have equal opportunities in school as other students who identified as White. She felt that teachers placed low expectations on her students and further explained that her interactions with administrators were not culturally responsive. Support in relation to equity and race meant that she wanted her family to be treated fairly, with dignity and respect.

Carmen (who identified as Hispanic), Rebecca (who had adopted children), and Jackie (who moved her student from a traditional high school) wanted to know that there were people with whom they could communicate and who would listen to their concerns. For Carmen, the language piece was particularly important. Maria and Chad, a family with seven students in the district, emphasized the importance of social-emotional support especially as needed for their students. Essentially, the sub-theme of *support-based* family engagement was important to all stakeholders in keeping families engaged

in preparing students for the future, even if that support was defined differently by the various stakeholders.

While the terms *family engagement* and *parent involvement* seem familiar with all stakeholders, family engagement was only used and acknowledged by one administrator in the true context of the term. Families, however, used the word involvement or the phrase parent involvement but their interpretations and perceptions of what they do as families to be engaged fell within the realm of all the themes – *activity-based*, *value-based*, *whole-family-based*, *partnership-based*, and *support-based* engagement. Families tended to have a more holistic approach to what family engagement looked like. For example, Carmen stated: “Pues que toda la familia estemos involucrados en la relación... en la educación pues de los niños.” In other words, she stated that every family member is involved in the education of their children. When asked how family engagement would look different in preparing her children for the future (PWR was explained in this context to her), she stated, “No, no creo. Creo que lo estoy haciendo bien. Creo.” The interpretation was that she believes that they have done a good job and she would not change anything.

Administrators and teachers thought that the terms *family engagement* and *parent involvement* were synonymous but had a preference for the term *family engagement*. There was some consensus that parent involvement appeared more passive: “I think when I think about parent involvement, I think maybe it’s more like just passive participation. We create opportunities for an open house, or family fun night, or things like that” (Linda, Director of PWR).

Being prompted by the researcher on both terms, administrators and teachers immersed in closer examination as to the implications regarding which term they used on a more regular basis. There was recognition that parent involvement implied only “parents” as affirmed by Debbie, the elementary teacher:

Well, when I think about parent involvement, I think of it as being just the parents. When I think of family engagement, I think it could be everybody in a family. It could be grandparents, it could be siblings, it could be cousins, aunts, uncles, extended family. Just everyone.

However, throughout the research, the perceptions of family engagement in PWR by administrators and teachers were mostly centered on activities such as homework checking and showing up for events and activities at schools. In other words, there was a component of visibility that equaled engagement. On the other hand, the perceptions of family engagement in PWR by families had all the themes in Category One as central components of their engagement in preparing students for postsecondary pursuits.

### **Category Two: Hopes and Dreams**

The second category generated in the findings was the hopes and dreams for students expressed by all the stakeholders in the Constant Spring School District. Educators talked about the types of environments they wanted for families, and the kinds of opportunities they hoped to create for students in the school and district. Families likewise referred to school environment as part of the success of their students, but moreover, they had significant aspirations for their students. In every instance, they

DREAMED BIG! This section presents the themes that emerged in Category Two: Hopes and Dreams.

**Feel welcomed.** All administrators desired for families to feel welcomed in the school environment. This related to the physical space, the interaction with staff the minute they walked through the door, as well as the relationship that families and students had with teachers and principals. Administrators, even at the district level, got particularly passionate and excited when they talked about families and students feeling welcomed at school. For example, as Susan responded to the question about hopes and dreams with a smile on her face and her hands clasped, she immediately uttered: “So, I just want every student, every family to feel like they have a home here. While the kids are going through school, while K-12, that there’s a place for them.” Kim, the elementary school principal echoed this attitude: “First and foremost is that they want to be here. In feeling welcomed in the school environment, students know that they have a relationship with teachers, there is a partner they can ask for help.” Debbie expanded even more by expressing that she hoped that as educators they could provide a very positive experience that later prepared students to be successful in the workforce.

This excitement could be felt in the way families talked about the school environment and they simply confirmed that they felt welcomed in the academic setting for their students. Jackie, a family member who identified as White and who has a son at the high school, leaned back in her chair and seemed almost at peace as she shared:

Here, as far as that family feel, I walked in here for that field trip the first time and I had two different teachers walk out of their classrooms and shake my hand to introduce themselves. This school is so welcoming.

A welcoming environment for families also translated into a sense of belonging. Families wanted their students to feel like they were in a school environment where they could thrive. Therefore, finding the right academic setting was important for families. Jackie expounded further that her son was not doing well in his previous high school where he felt overwhelmed by the work and left out of many circles with friends and teachers. She explained that his current high school in the Constant Spring School District provided a space where he could pursue his passions and begin to excel. She felt more confident now that his future was less at risk and he would be successful.

**Prepared for the world.** Administrators and teachers were fully aware of the ever-changing technological world that envelopes their students. As such, they constantly mentioned that they wanted their students to be prepared for jobs that did not even exist. Lisa, the Early Childhood Education Director and Principal stated:

I would like them to grow up to be thinkers and problem solvers and so everything we do from here on out, I cannot predict what the world is going to look like from here on out for the majority of time, but I think if we got kids that can think critically, who can look at information, wait, form an opinion and feel like they have the right to defend that opinion, my hope is that they can handle whatever they need.

An extension of being prepared meant that students would be able to connect their learning to real life as mentioned by Kim, the elementary school principal. But even further, being prepared required that students were “productive, functional members of society who have the tools to do what they want” (Bethany, Middle School Teacher). Even the whole child was considered as Debbie verbalized her reflection on what it meant to be prepared for the world:

For the students of this school, my hopes and dreams for them are is I hope as educators and as a school we can provide them with a very positive experience that not only not only prepares them to be successful in a workforce, but just in all aspects of their life. There’s so much involved with, I feel like, in life as a whole. There’s the health aspect, there’s you just feeling good about yourself, there’s goal setting. There’s how do you interact with other people, and how do you value other people? And so it’s more of the whole child, not just one particular area.

Families, on the other hand, did not refer directly to this level of preparation for the future. Rather, they saw the need for their students to graduate high school, pursue a bachelor’s degree and maybe even a graduate degree. The picture of being prepared for the postsecondary pursuits involved the more practical steps from one level to the next. The main goal of families was to get their students through school and that in itself would help to prepare them for the world.

**Doors of opportunities.** All stakeholders desired to create doors of opportunities for every student, or that every student would experience these doors of opportunities. The Constant Spring School District has a strong focus on creating opportunity. In fact,

the word *opportunity* occurred in every transcript multiple times which obviously spoke to a vision that is being engendered throughout the district. As such, stakeholders spoke with pride and authenticity about creating these paths of opportunities that would ultimately lead to success for students in whatever field they chose. Perhaps one of the most emotional aspects in every interview was realizing the passion that existed as teachers, administrators and families talked about their hopes and dreams where students had the opportunity to pursue their passions and become successful in their own right. Susan, the Superintendent, gently smiled and gestured with her hands as she expressed what her hopes and dreams were for students in the Constant Spring School District:

That their interest, that their imaginations or intellect is all being developed, and that they're given opportunity. And that they can be very positive, and hopeful, and excited about what their future opportunities are. And ultimately, that leads to the hope that we graduate kids out of Constant Spring schools that have choices that are real.

Christine, the high school principal, confirmed this sentiment when she stated, "My hope and dream is that my students are able to compete with all students for jobs, for whatever, that they're not thought less of, that they can compete." Robert, the other high school principal, explained that these doors of opportunities may reflect differently for some students, but ultimately create an option for every student:

My hope is that every single student that leaves here, number one, graduates, has a diploma in their hands, and they graduate with options. Whether those options are straight into a career, to a community college, to a four-year university, to an



internship program, to, maybe I didn't get it done in four years, I still have a fifth year, and here's some options to make sure that I do graduate...that they're not given up on after four years. That we give them that, whatever it takes to actually graduate and earn that diploma. That every single kid leaves this campus with options.

To illustrate this trickle-down effect, Tina, the high school teacher, emphatically said, "They have had their chance to learn a little bit of everything, so when they leave our doors and go out into the real world, every possible door for their future is open. They can walk through any door."

Families expressed that *doors of opportunity* were in the form of exposure and equity for their students. Dawn, a Black single mom, looked the researcher intensely in the eyes and spoke about the diversity of her family. She slid her right hand over the back of her left to indicate skin color then she very affirmatively said:

Well, I hope that they're exposed to as many things as they can be exposed to.

And those things that they latch onto that they love, that that can be something that has blossomed into something even more.... 'Do I like it? Do I not?' To open up those thoughts of, 'Oh, my gosh. When I grow up, I'm going to follow this that I love.'

Brenda, another family member who identified as Hispanic, conveyed the same sentiments almost verbatim but added: "I just want them to have the best education so they can have the best job that they choose. And not have the job choose them."

**Be somebody.** While the hopes and dreams of families were less overstated regarding their students feeling welcomed in the academic environment, or that they felt prepared for the world, there was great emphasis on students becoming somebody. The theme *Be somebody* was chosen to give voice to the language expressed by the families from diverse ethnicities. While, *Be somebody* was defined differently according to the cultural and social background of families, the definition ultimately conveyed the same hope and dream that their students have opportunities, work hard in school, pursue their passion, and ultimately become successful in life. Carmen had two students in the district, one in elementary and the other in early childhood. She shared that she wanted her students to study hard and do the best they could but this should lead to them “being somebody” in life. In her own words, Carmen stated: “Sí, por eso tienes que estudiar mucho para que tú puedas hacer eso... Así entonces sí les inculco que estudien mucho para que sean alguien en la vida.” The direct translation states: “yes, that is why you have to study hard so that you can do that... so then I instill in you that you study hard to be somebody in life.” It was further explained to the researcher that “being somebody” in the Hispanic culture meant to “become something, to have a profession.”

Matthew, another family member, was brief and abrupt as he shared his hope and dream: “I’d like to see them go to at least a bachelor’s degree in college.” He was not interested in other postsecondary options and was reluctant to embrace pursuits outside of a college education. Maria and Chad were also direct as they responded without hesitation: “Go to college.” Brenda expressed her desire:

I want them to do something that they want to go to work every day and just do it. And just enjoy every single moment of it. And not just be focused on like: ‘Oh, it’s another day, another dollar.’ And I think if they go to college and get that education and find that passion, they will be able to do that. They’ll be able to go to a job and say: ‘Yes! Another day at work!’ ...I want all my kids to excel!

Regardless of ethnicity, socio-economic status, or academic levels achieved by families, every family interviewed aspired for their students to “be somebody.” Families placed great value on postsecondary pursuits and did not envision their students discontinuing after high school.

Category Two revealed the hopes and dreams that stakeholders expressed for their students. The findings in this category indicated that teachers, principals, and district administrators hoped to create opportunities for students where they can be thinkers and leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Families also hoped that these opportunities would be created by schools and the school district. More significant for families was that they deeply desired for their students to *be somebody*. The aspirations and expectations of families for students to be successful in postsecondary pursuits persisted regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or cultural backgrounds.

### **Category Three: Barriers to Family Engagement**

Throughout the study, family participants expressed barriers that prevented them from being engaged according to expectations stipulated by the school environment, even without the researcher asking the question. Administrators and teachers were less likely to mention barriers until they were directly asked to share what they perceived as barriers

to family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness. While the barriers mentioned were closely aligned across responses from the various stakeholders, there were also disparate some perceptions. Responses from families strongly centered on time constraints and communication. Time constraints had to do with working multiple jobs, being unable to get time off from work, or managing multiple responsibilities with their other children. Communication for families meant that they did not feel as if they were getting adequate communication from school or the district to home, or in a language they could understand. However, families frequently commented that their engagement was beyond attending parent teacher conferences or some other school event or activity. As can be observed from the quotes in Category One, families gave significant weight to the time they spent with their children at home or the daily support they provided to help their children navigate the world on a regular basis. On the other hand, administrators and teachers had a general idea of some of the barriers but also had some misconception that families simply did not want to engage. The emerging themes are presented below.

**Time and work.** The number one theme that emerged in the category on barriers to family engagement was time and work. Every interview with families mentioned time as a barrier to being engaged and in most cases, work was the factor that impacted time. Regardless of demographic, whether it be socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender or number of children in the household, families collectively agreed on the issue of time. Brenda, a mother of three who identified as Hispanic, felt as though she was a single mom. Though married, her husband drove trucks for a living. He typically left on Mondays and returned home on Thursdays. She bore all the responsibilities of the home

during his away time. That morning, as she researcher met with Brenda, she could sense tiredness even before knowing Brenda's story. Brenda's eyes were weary and she kept taking deep sighs. As she talked about barriers, the many hats she wore became apparent:

A lot of the times I don't participate because I don't have time. I have to split myself into so many areas that I can't... and honestly, sometimes I'm exhausted... Sometimes I'm like: 'I can't.' Last night we had an event here in our school for my youngest. I got home like at 4:15, got home to do dinner, and then at 5:15 my younger son had soccer. I get to the soccer practice, I'm there for like five minutes, my daughter calls me, I have to go pick her up because she's done. I go pick her up at the high school, I come back, we stay on the practice for about 15 minutes and she has to go back home because she has to start homework, so we wait for my son to be done and more practice, rush home so she can start homework and I can finish dinner and do all that and then after that she has physical therapy so by seven, I (sigh) have to leave again, we all have to pack up and leave and ... then it's about 20 minutes or 15 minutes away. Not too bad. But, you know, the traffic. So, I don't get back home until 8:30. So by 8:30, I have to make sure that the house is decent looking, you know? So, I have to make sure dinner is ready because that's when my husband gets home. So, I have to make sure that dinner is ready for him, that the kids are fed, that my daughter is doing her homework correctly, that she doesn't have any questions, and then be ready for my husband to be home so I can get him dinner and so on top of that, I started college... again. So, I started taking two classes and they're online. So, on all that,

... have time to study, to read thirty chapters in one week, to be able to read articles and do research and do papers and do everything... And I think, is not an excuse, a lot of the times because we are exhausted, we can't get as involved as we want to be. (Exasperated and in a slightly elevated pitch) How? How?

Brenda's response in this rich, descriptive narrative was indicative of the sentiment shared by the other families. Not only did they have many hats to wear, but work schedules were not conducive to being present in a way that was ideal. Maria and Chad, who have a blended family with seven kids, explained what it was like trying to show up for events at school:

... there's sometimes where they'll have the events, and they'll start at like 4:00 or 4:30. And so that right there wipes out half of the parents right there just because, typically, people are working until about 5:00 or 6:00. So, half the parents, right there, aren't able to be involved in some of these events and participate in some of the events. And then when they have the ones that are from like 5:00 to 7:00, I notice that there's a lot bigger turnout just because everybody's able to attend.... So, timing, things like that, so. And then, also, a lot of the times they'll have events or things that happen at the school and it's at like 11 o'clock in the morning or two o'clock in the afternoon, you can't really expect a lot of parents to be able to participate in these times...--teachers and the faculty and stuff, they have personal lives and things like that so they're trying to coordinate those events to where they're----not at school for 12, 14 hours a day, but still, if they're wanting the involvement and they're actually wanting parents

to be able to participate and stuff, they should probably be more attentive to the parenting schedule versus the faculty schedule.

In spite of these experiences about time and work schedules not synchronizing with school activities, administrators reported a high level of engagement in parent teacher conferences. One high school in particular noted that family turn-out for conferences was nearly 100%. Teachers also took great pride in reporting that they saw 100% response to conferences. So, while families may be subjected to time constraints, the education of their children was vital and they sacrifice and make the necessary commitment to support their students. Jackie summed it up best when she said, “I just make it-- sometimes, I’m so tired, but I come anyway. Because your kids are only going to be in school for a certain number of years and it’s important to be involved, I think.”

**Communication to families.** Administrators expressed that communication was a significant barrier to families engaging in multiple ways. There was also a divide in how families perceived the communication from home-to-school or school-to-home. Three families believed that the schools did a fairly good job of communication while the other four families believed that there was significant room for improvement. It was interesting that the families who stated that communication needed improvement were from more ethnically diverse backgrounds with the exception of one. The four families were Brenda and Carmen (both identified as Hispanic), Dawn (identified as Black), and Ray (identified as White). The families who believed the school did a fairly good job were White except for Maria and Chad who identified as White and Hispanic. Overall, families wanted to stay informed about school activities, the academic progress of their students,

as well as positive interactions with staff. Families further expressed that they preferred electronic communication rather than paper versions as these types often got lost. It was also more convenient because as they watched games, or waited on their students at an activity such as a football game, they could read through the electronic communication on their phones.

Communication in a language that could be understood by all was mentioned as a barrier by all stakeholders. The school district has almost 40% of its population who identify as Hispanic, yet communication is not always modeled in multiple languages. The district administrators revealed in the interviews that the district has recently acquired a service where families can select the preferred language on the website. Further comments are made in the document analysis on the efficiency of the website. Carmen, who spoke primarily Spanish, affirmed this struggle with receiving communication in her language:

Pues creo que uno muy importante y que sí ha pasado es el idioma... Pues es que sí a veces dan papeles, bueno, aquí siempre dan papeles en español, pero en la otra escuela no siempre te dan el papel en español. Y si vas a la escuela, no hay con quien.

(Translated) One very important and it happens all the time is the barrier of language. Ok. For example, in here she always receives the paper bilingual, English and Spanish... But at the elementary school level, there is no-one who speaks... they don't send Spanish speaking... Spanish documents at home and when they come to school, there is no-one who speaks their language so...



As the Superintendent talked about the language barrier, she compared outcomes to the past to more recent improvements that have been made by the district. She related an instance where the school district employed a translation service at a very important community meeting with families and experienced a significantly higher turn-out than previous meetings where this service was not offered. She was thrilled when she saw the excitement on the faces of the families where they could hear the meeting conducted in their native languages.

Robert, the high school principal, commented that they had to be open to more and different ways of communicating with families. He recognized that modalities had to change in order to break the barrier. Communication as a barrier was a consistent theme throughout the interviews.

**Self-efficacy.** Administrators and teachers expressed that families may not be interested in education or engage in activities at school because of a lack of self-efficacy. They felt the engagement of families declined, especially as their students got older. This was in part due to the fact that families did not know how to support their students in school as they got older. Another aspect may be because of their experience with education. Bethany, a middle school teacher, shared the following:

Well, I think some parents' personal experience and education, I think it's very important. If they think that school was not useful for them or they felt like they were attacked by-- not attacked but sort of singled out or persecuted by their teachers or treated unfairly by the school system, then they don't have an inherent value for education, that they're going to really encourage their kids to do

something different... But I do feel like school didn't work for all our parents, and so they don't see the value in education.

On the other hand, families wanted to be engaged and did not necessarily see their self-efficacy as a barrier. Families strongly desired for their children to achieve above their own personal accomplishments and believed that their children could. For example, Dawn talked about how she lacks the resources her children sometimes need in terms of homework help, or information about college, but she actively researches as best she can, calls other families, or contacts others that she knew could help in the particular areas. She sighs and with large arm gestures, states: "I am always building just knowing that I want them to be better than me. I want them to be confident and proud." Her attitude was shared by other family members who talked about the fact they were making personal efforts to go back to school. Two family members were working on a General Education Development and two others were working on a college degree. They wanted to be role models as well as create capacity to support their students. Therefore, self-efficacy was a barrier more from the perception of the educators but not so much from the experiences of the families.

The barriers to family engagement in PWR are many and varied. However, time and work, communication to families, and self-efficacy were the themes that emerged most frequently in this study. The Superintendent, with her 360-degree view of the district, perhaps provided the best summary of the many barriers that families encounter in their quest to be engaged. In exasperation, Susan stated, "I think there's so many. Probably as many as there are parents out there." She continued in an extensive, thick,

rich description that captured the essence of Category Three: Barriers to Family

Engagement:

I think sometimes parents feel like they don't have the skill set, or they don't have the understanding or, "I just need to trust the professionals, because I just don't know." So, I think that's a barrier. It's sort of that understanding of what's my role and what's my place as a parent in this process, or as a family member in this process. I think that's a barrier. I think that certainly in our community, very practical barriers of things like there's language issues, if we have some folks who are perhaps newly immigrated or don't have a strong command of the language. We have poverty barriers. We have where our parents maybe are working several jobs, or they're doing shift work, or they're just not able to get to the school during those normal times, or be able to communicate with teachers during those times that we would say are the normal school times. And because they are working, or they're at home taking care of younger children, or they don't have transportation. I think that there are any number of barriers. And I also do think that because some of our parents perhaps themselves weren't able to move through their own educational experiences and maybe complete at certain levels, that then it's also just something that is very—it's just not in their scope of-- I don't want to say that it's not a priority, but there's 20 other things that come first: getting food on the table, paying the bills, making sure the rent is paid or the mortgage is paid, or whatever the case might be. So, I think there's a lot of barriers. A lot of barriers. And I think people are just busy [worried chuckle]. I

think people are busy. And when the kids are older, there is that piece where the kids sometimes will not want the parents around... So the parents are trying to balance that, “Where do I give my kid independence,” or, “Where do I go ahead and say, ‘Fine, I won’t go if she don’t want me to go,’ versus, ‘No, I’m going.’”... So a myriad of things.

#### **Category Four: Preparation for PWR**

Earlier in Category Two: Hopes and Dreams, the emergent theme of “Prepared for the world” was a central aspiration for all stakeholders interviewed. This developed into its own category as the researcher examined how families and educators perceived the process for preparing students for PWR. The following sections present the themes that emerged in Category Four: Preparation for PWR.

**Awareness of programs.** The first theme that was recognized in this category was the general awareness of PWR programs available to students and families in the Constant Spring School District. The findings revealed that families were not necessarily aware of PWR programs that were available in the Constant Spring School District or at the schools where their children attended. Those who were aware did not necessarily have the language to explain their knowledge as they were uncertain of the terms used for various PWR programs or course offerings in the school district. It was even more difficult for families who had little or no college exposure. Carmen shared that she was very disconnected with that area because she did not have relatives, like brothers or sisters, or other relatives that went to college, or know about postsecondary schools. However, Carmen wanted to know more and wanted that information in her spoken

language. On the other hand, Dawn was not aware of the PWR programs available but her response was one of cynicism as she exclaimed, “Gosh, I know that there is a cooking program the children can get into.... Absolutely not, but thank you.” As the researcher prodded her for clarification on her understanding and awareness of PWR programs, she explained that she thought those programs were minimal and her expectations for her daughter was much higher: “It’s not for my girls, I don’t think.” Dawn further shared that she had a difficult time accepting that her daughter with special needs may not go to college and even then, she was keeping her fingers crossed. Her other daughter was already accepted into a well-known college.

This lack of awareness about programs transpired whether or not families were willing to consider other postsecondary pursuits. Another example was Matthew who was reluctant to accept the thought of his children pursuing other postsecondary and workforce readiness programs besides college. He shrugged his shoulders almost as if to push the thought aside about alternative postsecondary programs and responded, “I’d like to see them go to at least get a bachelor’s degree, if not beyond. If they’re interested at that point.”

Conversely, other family members who were significantly aware of PWR programs did not appear as opposed. Jackie and Rebecca saw the programs as having a wide range of opportunities available to students, opportunities that gave them options as they emerged through life and perhaps would change their minds “100 times” (Jackie, High School Family) before finding direction. Jackie, in particular, was more receptive and understanding as she revealed to the researcher that her son had a difficult time in a

traditional school setting. In the alternative setting, she felt like he was able to pursue his passion and found a space where he could belong and thrive.

Administrators were mindful of this lack of awareness of PWR programs or opportunities with families and the reasons why this may be the case. Robert, the high school principal, shared a familiar scenario he encounters in his role:

...We follow-up and we sit down and have individual conversations with those kids, and maybe, if we have to, also bring their parents into that discussion too, and say, 'Have you ever thought about challenging yourself by doing this? ... Here's an opportunity to get free college credit. Let me say that again, Free college credit. While you are here in high school' [laughter] So you buy an \$85 book but you're getting three or four college credits for this class. Well, depending on what school you go to, sometimes those credit hours are two, three, four hundred dollars per hour. So, you're getting a \$800, \$1000 class for \$85. It's a pretty good deal... So sometimes you throw that out to parents and they're like, 'Oh! I didn't know that was a possibility.' Because when you and I were in school, really, those opportunities weren't there..... Well, I think part of it here too is college hasn't always been a priority for a lot of the students that go to school here. Or it's been something that's been viewed in their eyes as unattainable, 'I can't afford it. There's not an opportunity.' We still have kids here that are first time, first generation family members.

Other administrators, like Robert, were well informed of PWR offerings especially in the high schools and at the district levels. Teachers in the middle school and

elementary levels focused more on the exploration of passion and connecting the curriculum to life applications. They also noted that the district as a whole recently started the conversation about postsecondary and workforce readiness beginning from early childhood to high school and how to make it a continuous process rather than decentralized. The high school teacher interviewed was fully engaged in PWR programs as she was central to the process of advising and leading PWR events and programs.

**Skills needed.** Though a myriad of skills were mentioned by administrators, teachers and families combined, the skills were essentially grouped under the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills forged by the National Education Association (NEA). These skills are often referred to as the “Four Cs.” They are critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (National Education Association, 2012). Some administrators, teachers, and families referred directly to the term the “Four Cs” while others listed them specifically. Others skills cited in the interviews were problem-solving, social skills, organization, self-motivation, self-awareness, and academic skills. However, the two dominant sub-themes that stakeholders perceived were necessary in preparing their students for PWR were “respeto” and the Four Cs, which are presented below.

***Respeto.*** A prevailing theme within the families who identified as Hispanic and Black was the importance of respect. When asked by the researcher what skills she thought were necessary for her children to be prepared for the future, Carmen, with full assurance, echoed the following: “Pues yo siempre les he inculcado que respeten.” (Translated) “Respect. Always respect.” Brenda, also a family member who identified as Hispanic, stated: “You are able to get places... if you have that respect. And it’s for

everything. It's not just for work, it's not just for school, it's for human beings, for animals, for feelings, for everything. So, just having those values and then everything will... make sense, I guess."

It was noteworthy that White families were not as concerned about their children needing to have "respeto." Likewise, teachers and administrators were not as emphatic as were the families of color, but did hold the belief that students needed to learn and be taught respect as a PWR skill.

**21<sup>st</sup> century skills.** A common reference in skills that were perceived as necessary for PWR were the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. Families seemed well informed on these skills and consistently mentioned them in the interview as skills that were necessary for their children to be successful in life. While they may not always remember what the Four Cs are, they would use the abridged term of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. They felt strongly that these skills were important and that the schools in partnership with families played an essential role in developing these skills. Matthew explained not only the relevance of these skills but also the challenge as a family member trying to embed these skills in his children:

I know they keep calling them the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, I think, are probably the more important ones than a lot of the-- I mean, granted, having a good reading background and vocabulary is helpful, having a good math background is helpful. But being able to do those... And it takes repetition sometimes [laughter]. And sometimes it's tough for parents [laughter].

Kim, the elementary school principal, explained what the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills look like in the school setting:



...And then the other of what they need then goes back to some of those, what we consider those 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, like critical thinking, problem-solving, persevering when things get hard, not just giving up. So that component I see looking at more when they're exploring a topic of their choice, or doing a research project, and how can we embed some of those 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills? So creativity, looking at how-- giving kids the opportunity to be really creative with their learning as well. So I think it's a little bit of both. The foundation of reading, writing, proficiently at their grade level so they can communicate, so they can comprehend. I think those are two real biggies with literacy. And then with math is the number sense, and then pairs with the critical thinking and problem-solving and really being creative with their learning, too.

The Four Cs and respect were core to preparing students for PWR. There is nearly consensus that there are many and varied skills needed but they could conceivably be grouped in these two areas. In addition to these two sub-themes, academic skills are critical, but families felt as though those were a given. The softer skills of being able to communicate, problem-solve, and to think outside the box all needed intentionality in order for these to be incorporated in the curriculum on a regular basis.

**Funds of knowledge.** In the early childhood education practices, there were efforts made for teachers to shed their role as teacher and become a learner so that they could know their students and families in a different way (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). This knowledge takes into account the experiences, social practices, and social history of the families. This is referred to as funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff &

González, 1992) which has emerged as another theme. Home visits by teachers was a practice carried out by the early childhood education teachers to accomplish the goal of learning more about families. Lisa explained that the ECE Center was still navigating how to use this strategy for best outcomes, especially as a form of culturally responsive practices. Nevertheless, she explained in the interview the reasons why home visits were conducted:

To connect with families and to connect with the child... When our teachers take the time and the effort to go into somebody's home, I think that parents realize that this is a partnership and it takes away that sense of you drop the kids off at the door because you make the bridge work both ways. I think it gives the kids at the beginning of the school year a feeling of safety when the teacher comes to their world, instead of bringing them into an entirely new place where the teacher is dominant and I think it takes the time factor out. I think when somebody comes to your home, to say: 'I'm here just to meet you, we're going through what preschool is going to be like.' It doesn't feel like, 'I have a meeting with the teacher,' that somebody is in trouble and this is going to be done in 20 minutes and off we go. And what we hear from families is that it makes a huge difference to them. And then in some cases it also gives you a perspective on where that child is coming from.

Though home visits were not practiced in other school levels in the district, it was obviously important to families that their children were not considered another number and that the home environment was a significant consideration for teachers and

administrators as they prepared students for postsecondary and workforce readiness.

Rebecca talked about the emotional and mental struggles she had at home with one of her three children. She explained how these issues affected the family and the academic considerations that need to be given to her students. It was important to her that administrators and teachers understood the home experiences, and the home culture of her students, and should use that knowledge to enhance the academic experiences. The lived experience of Rebecca played out in the following dialogue:

I like the parent-teacher conferences and the just hanging out with people and having the ability to talk one-on-one with the teachers and the counselors. Back to school night was very structured and I broke those rules anyhow and stayed after and talked to the teachers one-on-one even when we weren't supposed to... I like being able to talk to the teachers and say, 'Here's something else that's happened recently that you probably need to know about and you tell me what kind of thing that is happening with my child in your class.' And you really need to have those one-on-one conversations. They don't need to be long, but having those four minute check-ins with the teachers one-on-one, I find them really, really helpful as a parent. And whether it's that structured thing or just like finding people in the lunchroom and talking. I had a whole conversation with the Dean...a month or two ago about Jeremy (*pseudonym*) and about Amber (*pseudonym*) and it turned out to be a fantastic conversation. And so, it was good. Because she got to hear whole other sides to Amber and Jeremy that she had no idea about. She had only had a couple of interactions with Jeremy that were in a much less than positive

light [nervous laughter] and didn't know Amber hardly at all. For such a small school, it was kind of like, well, you need to know a little bit more of the 360-degree view of the kids than just this 40-degree view of Jeremy and knowing that he has a sibling somewhere else that doesn't look anything like him, but is incredible just like he's incredible. And she was like, 'Oh, my gosh, I had no idea that Jeremy was doing this and he does what? And, oh, Amber's doing this and oh my gosh.' And so, it seems like she had a much better way of understanding the kids so hopefully that would influence her approach next time she has to talk to either one of them.

It was observed that there was a strong desire to collaborate with teachers and administrators in a way where the home experiences and environment were considered in preparing students to be ready for postsecondary and workforce readiness. Families felt that if teachers and administrators knew their child as more than just another student present in their classrooms, then they were more likely to feel connected to the school and district. In addition, families verbalized that it was important that their customs, their values, their home environment, and their experiences were integrated into the fabric of the schools and what their students were learning. They believed that this incorporation of values and customs constructed a partnership where teachers and families gave students the necessary PWR skills to be successful after leaving high school.

Another aspect of this theme is that families wanted to be known for who they were and what they brought to table. Matthew, who had maintained a low-key stance throughout the interview, got slightly excited when he mentioned that the Superintendent

knew his name and who he was simply because she had engaged in the community and with families regularly. It was for him, a social activity and experience which presented opportunities for reciprocity between families and educators (González et al., 2005). He compared the interaction to past superintendents who he scarcely knew, or who expressed no interest in him as an individual. Jackie was also excited about the fact that she was able to text teachers about her son because oftentimes personal phone numbers were protected by teachers with a caller ID block. These instances occurred because teachers and administrators revealed that they switched to learner mode, realized what their families needed, adapted their approaches to connect, and placed value on the home experiences (González et al., 2005). Having access, having personal connection, having the home environment considered and valued, and being able to relate about what was going on personally made families feel respected and connected to the schools.

In Category Four, stakeholders described the skills and relationships they thought were necessary in preparing students for PWR. The skills mostly discussed by families, teachers and administrators were the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. Respeto was also key but this was reflected more in the narratives from families. The awareness of programs presented unique perspectives in Category Four. There was a lack of awareness among some families about the types of PWR programming that exist in the school district. These families in particular were more resistant to PWR programs and saw the curricula as less than ideal for their students. They believed that these PWR programs meant their students were not achieving higher expectations such as going to college. Teachers and

administrators were more knowledgeable of PWR programs and understood the opportunities these created for students.

More than awareness of programs or skills necessary, there was significance placed on relationships between families and educators. Families desired to be viewed from an asset-based lens where who they are as individuals was validated in the educational setting. They appreciated when teachers took the time out to learn more about their students in a way that incorporated the home setting, and cultural backgrounds and contributions. While teachers and administrators also desired partnerships with families, their perspective remained school-centric and did not necessarily consider these other social or cultural variables.

#### **Category Five: Role of Stakeholders**

The final category illustrates the role of stakeholders in postsecondary and workforce readiness. Each stakeholder was seen as essential to family engagement in PWR. Though each stakeholder held a different role in the district, their expectations on how the other functioned were similar. For example, district administrators, principals, teachers and families were all perceived as providing some sort of support for families to be engaged in PWR. As such, this section was not reported based on roles but rather on the expectations the stakeholders had regarding each other. The three major themes that emerged were: provide support, believe in students and set the culture. The findings are presented in the following sections.

**Provide support.** All stakeholders were described as providing support. While the support looked different depending on roles, the theme remained consistent

throughout the conversations. Families, from the onset, believed that their roles centered on providing support to their students, and felt that they were already meeting obligations to complete academic responsibilities. Families also believed that the roles of teachers, principals and district focused on providing resources, developing systems, and monitoring and casting the vision of the school district. They explained that the teachers provided support to the students through the curriculum and values that were taught, and via the relationships built with students and their families.

It was noticeable that the administrators and teachers mentioned the supportive role of families but in a manner which was more school-centric. In some instances, there was doubt as to whether or not families were actually fulfilling that role of support. The district, for example, was hopeful that families were, in fact, providing support. Susan reflected and provided the following response:

hopefully...partnering in such ways that they can help support a student or a kiddo in deciding what are their passions, what are their career pathways, and hopefully the family is playing the role of support.

Debbie, the elementary teacher, while not as doubtful, emphasized that the support role was really a partnership. She explained:

So the role of families. I think the role of family is really being that family, that support system for the student. And then it really is—it's a partnership between the school and the family, keeping that partnership alive and well as best as possible.

Teachers and administrators also saw their functions as being supportive. In the same breath, Debbie explained that her role as a teacher was to provide support to families:

I think a lot of it is just educating parents as we are through parent-teacher conferences and helping to support these parents to understand how they best can support them in school and just having those conversations with parents. When we are talking about how students might be struggling and in specific areas, here's how you can support homework help, or here's how you can support them to do better with their reading...and just educating them and helping them to know how to best support their kids.

Robert, the high school principal, likewise expressed that he “needed the district to be that support person.” Whether it was providing resources, putting systems in place, being flexible with when and where he needed a meeting, it all came down to support. He felt that being assisted in these ways was vital in helping him support families in the way that they needed. The interviews with the other two principals revealed the same requirement. The Superintendent and the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness both echoed the sentiment that they existed to provide the systems that were needed to achieve the vision:

And then, as a district, I mean our job is to help lead that charge and to make sure that we have the structures in place, make sure that we have the resources in place, make sure that there's a common vision, make sure that we're all working toward a common purpose. That's why the strategic plan has been so important.



So we need to help provide a combination of the vision and the systems in order to be able to support the work (Linda, Director of PWR).

This theme revealed that providing support was recursive and complex; ideologically, stakeholders were not at polar opposites. None of the roles were seen as acting alone in the effort to impact family engagement in PWR. All stakeholders desired to create a supportive and collaborative relationship between each other.

**Believe in students.** The message conveyed to students was consistently mentioned by administrators, teachers and families. Administrators emphasized the importance of conveying positive and “can do” messages to students. Administrators revealed that this was not necessarily the case in the district and so there was a deep desire by district administrators and principals to change the messages that students and their families were receiving. They believed that there needed to be a shift in teachers seeing their role as influencers who have the capacity to deliver messages that instilled belief in what students could become, and messages that prepared students for college, work, and life. Susan explained how these messages might be conveyed from the role of the teacher:

I think the messages that they give to kids - again, whether those are overt messages or covert messages - are so influential. Just even throw away statements like, ‘I can’t believe you don’t understand that math problem, we’ve gone over it 20 times.’ That right there, person, ‘I’m bad at math.’ So, I think that teachers are huge influencers. Again, whether it’s even just in their conversations, whether it’s

in the opportunities that they present, or the opportunities that they limit or don't allow for, I think that teachers play a huge role.

Evidence of this perception played out in a story told by one family. Brenda, who identified as Hispanic, expressed frustration when she talked about the level of expectation the school placed on her daughter in high school and the kind of belief that was being established. She described an occasion where she spoke with a teacher during a conference. The teacher seemed pleased that the student was achieving a B grade. In her own words, Brenda shared how the interaction occurred:

I went to a parent teacher conference with my high schooler and one of the teachers is like 'Oh, she's doing great! Oh my God! Look at her grades!' And then: 'She even has a B in AP class.' And I was like: 'That is not ok.' I was like: 'A B is not ok for me.' I was like: 'No. And if you settling for a 'B' for my daughter, it is not ok.' Her face just totally changed. Because she was really positive and trying to tell me and then she told me she had a 'B' and I was like: 'No. I know what my child can do and I hope that you know what my child can do too.' And she was like: 'On no! I just mean that she's doing really good.' And I was like: 'Well, she can do better.' I was like: 'I know that I am hard on her, but I know what she can do.'

Families supported this view that belief in their students impacted their education and trajectory for the future. Carmen's curt response was: "La primer persona que hace que los niños se empiecen a gustarle." Translated, Carmen thinks that "teachers are the first person who would make the children like education." Stakeholders agreed that they must

engage in communicating positive messages to students and families in order to graduate more students and prepare them for life and work in the 21st century.

**Set the culture.** The final theme in this category referred mainly to teachers, principals, and school district personnel. While these stakeholders believed that families created a kind of academic culture at home for their students to succeed, the central focus was on the educational environment setting the culture for family engagement in PWR. Teachers were regarded as setting the culture at the classroom level while administrators were seen as setting the culture at the school and district levels. Setting the culture where families are engaged in PWR meant that the principals had to cast the vision and establish those values. However, both teachers and principals felt that this also trickled down from the district. Bethany, the middle school teacher, explained it in the following way:

I think principals are big in setting the tone for the school as a whole, what the culture is in the school, who we are, and what we do, and what we value, and how we do things... So, setting the tone for the school and creating a culture in the school, a culture of achievement, a culture where this is who we are and we expect that we're all going to achieve to this level, I think starts at the top. I think that's one thing a principal can do on a level that's greater than just individual classroom teachers. We all set the tone for our own classrooms. And I think when kids-- after a couple of weeks of school when they come in here, they know what I expect of them. But I only have my kids. I'm contributing to the culture of the school, but I'm not creating the culture of the school.

Families made this obvious in their comments also. Rebecca remarked:

For principals, it's really setting the tone, there's a whole lot that principals can do to set the tone to encourage the teachers to make sure that it's a school wide effort and not just on the counselor's shoulders, or not just on the gifted teachers or the honors teachers.

Overall, there was agreement that students were attending good schools with welcoming environments. There was hope expressed by families who identified as Black and Hispanic that schools would set and develop a culture of more inclusivity. The district also felt that their role should be focused on establishing values, and creating cultures of success where all their students could belong and thrive.

Category Five illustrates that family engagement in PWR had similar expectations from stakeholders even though their roles were different. All stakeholders in this study considered providing support, believing in students, and setting the culture were essential in engaging families in PWR. These functions may look different based on individual roles of stakeholders, but were still overlapping. For example, families provide support to students at home and school. Teachers, likewise provide support to students in the academic setting, principals provide support to teachers, and the school district provides support to the schools through resources.

All stakeholders were regarded as influencers who could project beliefs on students. Whether this belief was covert or overt, the message needed to be positive and constructive. Lastly, stakeholders set the culture for family engagement in PWR. While the families were viewed primarily as setting the culture at home, stakeholders discussed

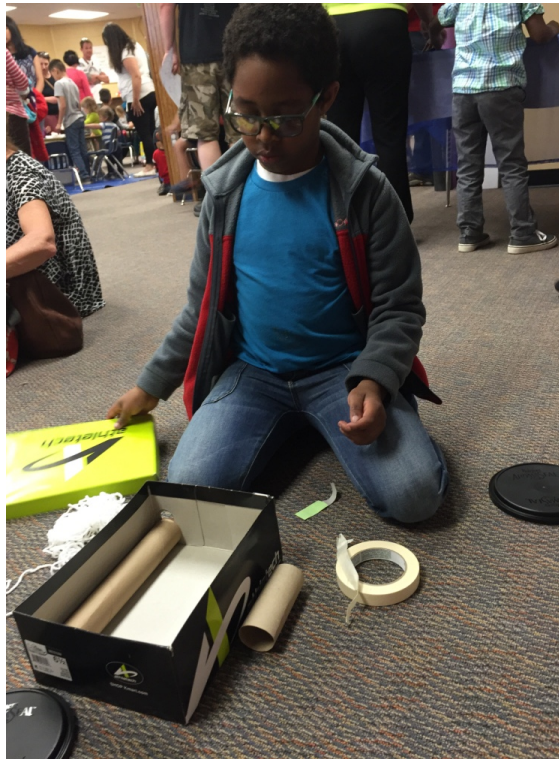
that teachers, principals, and district administrators were essential in casting the vision and developing shared values which were necessary for family engagement in PWR.

### **Observational Analysis**

The previous sections in Chapter Five presented the findings on the themes and sub-themes that emerged in the semi-structured interviews conducted in this research. Observations were a vital component of the research study to triangulate the data with the findings in the interviews and in the document analysis. The researcher chose to observe and analyze two events and two school environments to examine family engagement in PWR. This section will provide thick rich descriptions of the observations and then corroborate with the themes that emerged in the interviews.

**STEAM night.** STEAM night took place at the early childhood education campus. The activity was one of the many family nights planned throughout the year. Families were greeted at the entrance by staff where they were asked to sign in and give names of their students. They were warmly ushered into the rest of the area with a brief overview of the activities. The room was filled with random recycled material. As the researcher walked around the room, she noticed and was told that some tables were run by families where they guided children through experiments while others were manned by teachers or older students in the school district. Other areas were flexible where students were allowed to engage with the material in whichever way they desired. Figure 6 illustrates this freedom of creativity as a student used the covers of coffee containers, a shoebox, paper towel rolls, and tape to create a vehicle of sort.

Families milled around from one area to the next. The chatter was loud with vibrant energy in the room. Families engaged with each other and seemed to be fairly familiar with other families that were in the room. Some families could be heard introducing themselves as their students came in close proximity with each other at a particular station. The diversity was also notable. There were families from varying ethnicities. Spanish, Arabic, and English languages could be overheard in conversations. The researcher knew these languages because of her familiarity with the language and assumptions were not made on her part. There was also a mix of varying ages of students.



*Figure 6. STEAM Night Recycled Project. This figure illustrates a child using recycled material to create a vehicle of his choosing.*

Students from early childhood all the way through high school wandered from one station to the next. Figure 7 shows high school and middle school students cup stacking. Early childhood students were also engaged in this activity.

The researcher observed that the teachers and administrators were also engaged with families. Teachers and administrators walked around the room interacting with families with a great level of comfort and ease. Teachers assisted at stations where a little more guidance was needed or simply spent time with the students in a different environment, and environment that was casual, flexible, and chatty.

Students could be heard using 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. For example, one child needed additional supplies as he created his STEAM model. He was encouraged by a family member to use negotiating skills with other students in the room. Sure enough, he acted on the advice given and began to work his way across the room. He came back with the supplies he needed to continue his creation. Other students were also observed problem-solving and negotiating to achieve their desired goals. In almost every circle, families were fully engaged in an activity with students.

The researcher switched between participatory and non-participatory observer as this was the event where she was also able to recruit families for her study. As a participant, she was introduced by the Early Childhood Education Director and Principal to families as a doctoral student from a local university. Her study was briefly explained by the principal who then gave her a chance to interact with the families further about her study. At this point, the researcher also handed the families a flyer with information about the research and her contact information (see Appendix A). The researcher had an opportunity to build

rapport with the families as she interacted with them. There was small talk over the evening event and activities they were doing with their students. This allowed for a natural comfort level with families who were later interviewed for the study.



*Figure 7. STEAM Night Cup Stacking. This figure illustrates students engaged in the activity of cup stacking.*

As a non-participant observer, the researcher walked around the room listening to dialogues between families and educators, paying close attention to interactions, engagement with students, and how activities were accomplished. She was both reflexive and reflective during the process. The researcher took a few pictures (with permission) to capture the essence of the event. Field notes were written immediately after leaving the event since it was difficult for the researcher to do notetaking during the event.



The STEAM event was an artful display of family engagement in PWR. While the event was strongly *activity-based*, it carried over several themes that emerged from the interviews as well as was the topic of discussion in interviews with families and administrators. Initially, it could be observed that families felt welcomed into the environment as they and their students immediately gravitated towards their area of interest in the room. Conversations were also relaxed and jovial. Even though it seemed chaotic as students buzzed from one station to the next with their families, there was a sense of community in the conversations and interactions that occurred. This was confirmed by the fact that the researcher's own family was present at the event and naturally integrated into the interactions with families and students without feeling excluded or unwelcome.

The event was also a form of preparation for PWR thereby possibly opening up doors of opportunities as students were introduced to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills such as creativity, collaboration, negotiation, and problem-solving, among others. In spite of the barrier of time and work, the response to the event was a success from the perspective of the school administration who made comments in this regard to the researcher. The Early Childhood Education Director and Principal also mentioned that there were families who reported they would attend but who were not present. This is an indication that there are always challenges that families encounter even though they are well-intentioned to engage in school events and activities.

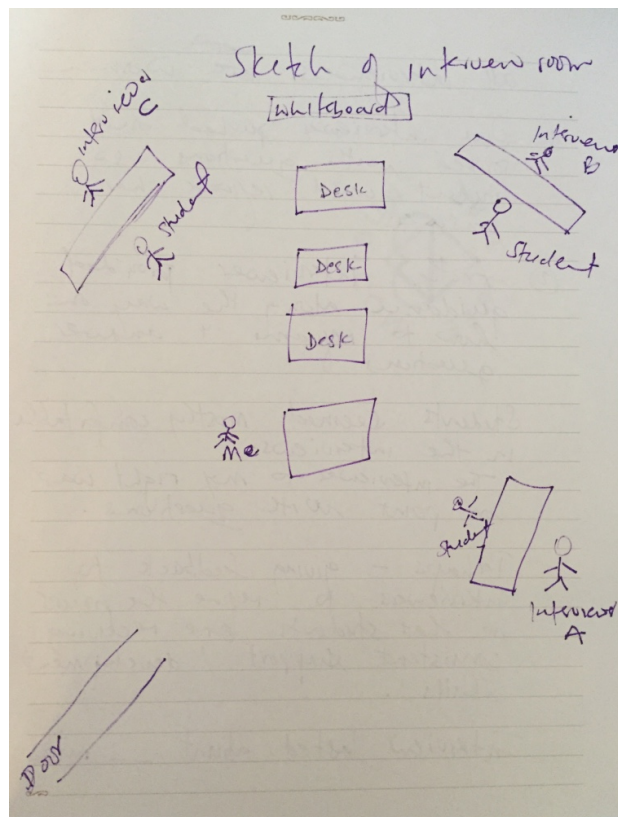
As an event where families were spending time with their students, and were able to interact with administrators and teachers, it realized the *value-based* definition of

family engagement discussed in the interviews. Families emphasized the need for opportunities where they could spend time interacting with their students, not just an event that they observed or a meeting with staff about their students. The STEAM event, therefore, also fostered a culture that was supporting postsecondary and workforce readiness in a *partnership-based* environment.

**Mock job interviews and opportunity fair.** The researcher attended Mock Job Interviews and an Opportunity Fair at one of the district's high schools. The mock interviews were meant to give students the opportunity to practice interviewing skills for summer jobs and or jobs after high school. The day is a culmination of the IGNITE program, which is aimed at helping students learn about career possibilities by linking them through visits to different locations and types of employment. The program further drives students to reflect on their futures, build relationships and connections, and increase relevance between school and their future lives. As part of the program, the students participate in team building experiences to help them learn such 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills as problem-solving, collaboration, leadership and integrity.

As a non-participatory observer, the researcher sat in the room where the interviews were conducted and listened to the interchange. The researcher was positioned in a way that she could see only the backs of the students and could take field notes without the students noticing. There was also less likelihood of eye contact from students and they could carry on as though the researcher was not present. Figure 8 is a sketch of one of the interview rooms. Present in the room were two male students and one female student to be interviewed. They were all casually dressed as they would be on a normal

school day. All three interviewers were female. Two were more formally dressed in suits while the other was in casual attire. The session started with the interviewers asking a series of questions, feedback was then provided, the interviewers closed with a review and feedback of the student's resume. The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. The researcher noticed that one interviewer coached the student throughout the time rather than follow a format of question, answer, and then feedback.



*Figure 8.* Mock Interview Room. This figure illustrates the location of the researcher and students that were engaged in the mock interviews with employers.

Questions overheard throughout the interviews were:

1. What would set you apart if I were to hire you?
2. Tell me about a time you were in a stressful situation.

3. What are the strengths you will bring to this job?
4. What weakness do you have and how did you handle it?
5. Are you available to work on weekends?

Students seemed somewhat nervous as could be heard through their responses or the jittery movements made by hands and feet. One student kept apologizing throughout the interview and the interviewer gave assuring words and told her not to apologize. As the time narrowed, an organizer walked into the room to give the five-minute warning. Students thanked the interviewers for the opportunity and likewise the interviewers thanked the students as they wrapped up the interview.

The researcher then moved to the school's gymnasium where the Opportunity Fair was located. The school chose Opportunity Fair over career fair as it is an opportunity to connect students with summer jobs, community service, and college and career opportunities. *Opportunity* is also a foundational theme to the school as they provide a second opportunity for students who have struggled in other school environments. The language from the principal, teachers, and parents resound with the word *opportunity*.

The gymnasium was lined on the periphery with employers, community service organizations, and universities offering free college courses. The students entering the gymnasium were given a passport (see Appendix F) as a means of engaging them with the opportunities presented in the gym. Upon leaving, the students checked out, showed their passports and were given a complimentary item. As each student returned to the exit table, he or she was asked, "What opportunity was your favorite and why?"

The researcher observed interactions between the vendors and students. She also visited tables, explained who she was, and followed up with questions about the opportunities being presented. Vendors explained what they were offering and expressed excitement to interact with the students.

Though families were not present in this event, it was obvious that they were still engaged in other ways such as through communication to and from the school. Families talked about how a majority of events at the school were geared towards PWR. They had great respect for the opportunities presented and declared support for what the school was doing. The principal and teacher interviewed from this particular high school confirmed this affirmation from families. Christine, the principal proudly stated:

Our parents love us [laughter]. ... Yes, but all of the data is very glowing about how our parents perceive the program. They feel like many of our students come here for a last chance. Right? And so, they're very thankful because they feel like their child is cared about. I mean, that's what they'll say. Cared about and taken care of is what they'll often say.

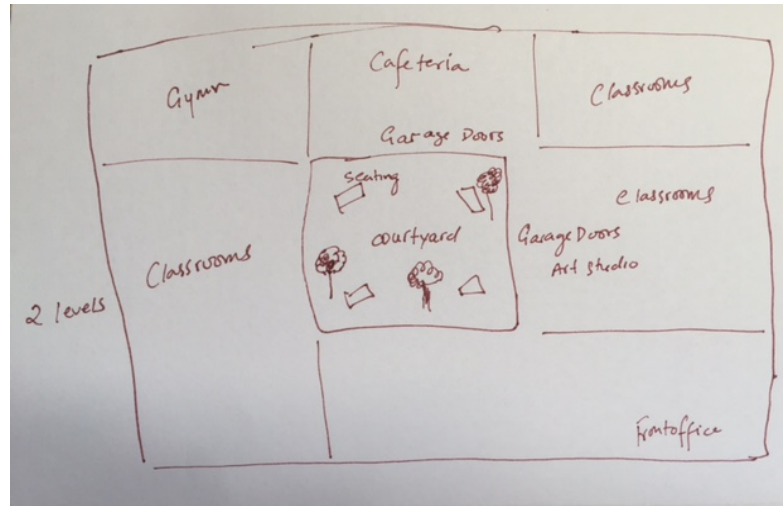
The mock job interviews and opportunity fair corroborated the information revealed in the interviews with stakeholders in other ways. The events occurred just as explained by the teacher, though it was observed that students were not dressed professionally for the mock interviews. Nevertheless, the format remained fairly consistent. The event connected to the categories of hopes and dreams and preparing for PWR. Relevant themes such as doors of opportunity, prepared for the world, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills could be observed as students progressed through the interview activities and opportunity

fair. Students had tremendous support from their family teachers which facilitated a partnership-based relationship.

**School environments.** The researcher chose to observe the school environments to triangulate themes that were emerging in the data. The first school visited was one of the high schools. The staff was warm and friendly at the front desk. Small chatter occurred and the researcher was directed to wait for the principal who would be interviewed. A classical music piece played over the intercom during passing periods. The researcher learned that the piece was composed by a student. All the music played during passing periods were composed by students, varying from rock, to rhythm and blues, to classical.

A guided tour was given after the interview. The principal explained the many items distributed throughout the hallways, how the school was rebuilt, and the purpose and mission of the school which was focused on preparing students for postsecondary options. As an alternative high school, the school principal emphasized that it was a place for students to explore their passions and develop 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. While these characteristics should not be exclusive to an alternative high school, the principal was notably proud that there were numerous opportunities for these to be developed in this high school. The school had a unique blend of open and closed spaces to facilitate collaboration and communication. Classrooms were not closed off spaces but rather walls were constructed only three-quarters of the way up to the ceiling and had curved entrances into classrooms instead of closed doors. The entire school was wrapped around an internal courtyard where the researcher was told that students often congregated,

especially in the spring months. Teachers also used the space for outside classroom time. There were garage doors on two sides of the courtyard that could be opened creating an indoor-outdoor atmosphere. Figure 9 is a sketch of the school's layout.

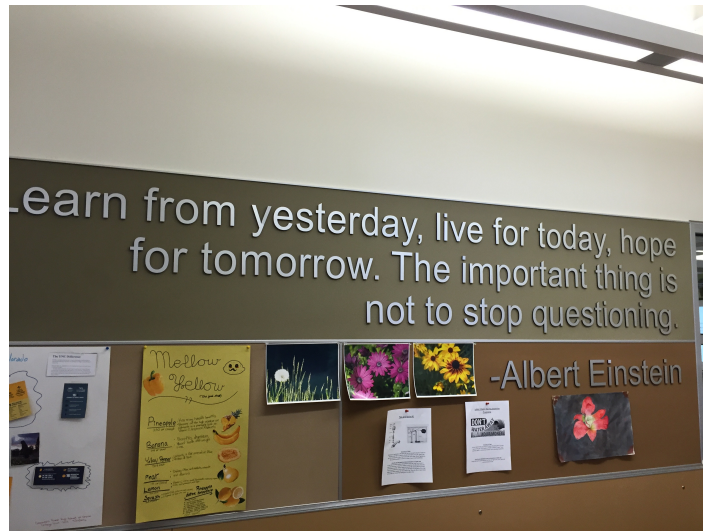


*Figure 9.* Layout of School. This figure illustrates the layout of the classrooms and cafeteria in relation to the courtyard.

As the researcher continued to observe the interaction between principal and students, and teachers and students in the hallway, she noticed that students were warm, friendly and chatty with principals and teachers. There seemed to be mutual respect and a sense of genuine interest and care for students. Students also seemed excited to be at school. The walls had numerous plaques filled with encouraging quotes from renowned figures throughout history as can be seen in Figure 10. It was a way of reminding students to think about their futures each day. The halls also had students' work on display. There were artifacts that had won awards, others artifacts completed by students with families, and college pennants. Figure 11 displays the artifacts from an art class that took place at the alternative high school with families and their students. The work is on

display so each time the families come to campus or as students pass the display in the hallway, it is a reminder of their engagement in a tangible way.

The other tour and observation took place at another high/middle school campus. This campus was in stark contrast to the previous site. A more recently constructed building, the school was industrial and modern in architecture with open spaces that mirrored a college environment. The campus housed two middle schools and a high school. The space was created with postsecondary and workforce preparation in mind as well as the creation of a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment.



*Figure 10.* Wall Quote. This figure illustrates a sample of the quotes that lined the walls of the high school.





*Figure 11. Art Display.* This figure illustrates the artwork completed by students with their families at an art event related to PWR.

As the researcher entered the office, the staff was polite. She noted that they were not as chatty as the previous school or as inviting. Nevertheless, she did not feel unwelcome, though it was obviously a more sterile environment. The tour was guided by the Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness. The classrooms had large windows and families could easily see into the rooms as students interacted with their coursework. The design cycle of the building is broken into wings. They are: the STEM Wing, the Fine Arts Wing, the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Wing, and the Student Commons. The school is equipped with state of the art equipment such as 3D printers, laser engravers, a kitchen stocked with industrial grade equipment, a black box theatre, digital production studio, fitness and dance studios, tiered lecture halls, and graphic arts space. The school is also equipped with two full-sized athletic courts and retractable bleachers. The building is designed in such a way to encourage community use of shared spaces. Essentially, one is left with the impression that students are presented with

opportunity and access to classes, equipment, and models that set them up for future success. Captured in Figure 12 is the industrial grade kitchen where culinary skills are tested and executed.

The school also fosters a strong sense of postsecondary opportunities with many college pennants displayed throughout the schools, and an area dedicated to postsecondary research. The area pictured in Figure 13 was just one of the many layouts of postsecondary resources found in the Counseling/Advising Center and throughout other spaces in the school.



*Figure 12.* Industrial Kitchen. This figure illustrates the culinary and hospitality space where students are able to utilize high grade, industrial-level equipment.



*Figure 13. Postsecondary Brochures.* This figure illustrates the many resources provided to students at the high school regarding PWR.

The observation at these high schools also validated the themes that emerged in the interviews with stakeholders. Similar to the mock interviews and opportunity fair, the physical environment of the schools tied into the categories of hopes and dreams and preparation for PWR. The Constant Spring School District strongly desires to create an environment where students are ready for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs. The construction and upgrades in the schools facilitate doors of opportunity and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.

The emphasis on a welcoming environment was a unique experience at each campus. As the researcher toured the buildings, she was warmly received by staff which spoke to the welcoming environment that the district hopes to create. The researcher noted, however, that the front office staff at the high/middle schools were not as forthcoming and welcoming as teachers and principals encountered throughout the tour. Nevertheless, this sense by the researcher was in contrast to what families reported in the interviews. On the other hand, the front office staff at the alternative high school were extremely friendly. The researcher observed interactions with families at the front desk

during her tour at that school. The staff was warm and helpful. Rather than being directed where to go, families were often escorted to the location by a staff member. This allowed for friendly chatter between families and staff as they were escorted. There was a sense of value and respect towards families.

The observations provided a multi-dimensional lens on how families are engaged in PWR at the schools. In the interviews, families were not necessarily aware of the PWR programs offered by the school district. Yet, the culture and environment of the high schools and middle schools are centered on PWR. It was unclear why families were not aware of how schools were shaping the lives of students around postsecondary and workforce readiness. Why was there a disconnect between the school environments and the families' awareness of programs? The researcher surmised that this may be a result of the lack of communication that families expressed frustration about in the interviews. In addition, if engagement is traditionally targeted on homework, parent teacher conferences, signing off on the paper information sent home, and other such activities, then there is the possibility of limited exposure to the network of opportunities that is available in the schools.

### **Documentary Analysis**

Documentary analysis also played a key role in the triangulation of the data for the study. By examining different data sources, the researcher was able to corroborate findings, therefore reducing bias and building credibility (Bowen, 2009). The researcher used a systematic procedure for reviewing and analyzing various documents to include both printed and electronic (Bowen, 2009).

A thematic analytical approach was used in that the researcher was more focused on re-reading and reviewing documentary evidence for patterns and themes. Similar to the interviews, documents were coded and categorized to uncover themes pertinent to the study. The documents that were reviewed for the study were (a) the district's website, (b) each school's website, (c) the district's strategic plan, (d) the PWR strategic plan, (e) the district's family handbook, (e) newsletters/brochures, and (F) handouts on PWR. A thorough review of documents helped the researcher to understand the background of family engagement in PWR in the school district. The documentary data served to position the research with tangible results for some of the themes that emerged.

The documentary analysis revealed several aspects of communication as discussed by all stakeholders in the interviews. Both families and principals complained about the lack of information and up-to-date communication on the websites, teacher pages, and printed information brought home by students. While principals make significant efforts to send weekly, and in some cases daily communication, to families, families still felt as though this was not sufficient. A review of the websites for each school confirmed the irregularity in communication. Oftentimes, the teacher pages were not current or had minimal information. The newsletters were also outdated. One school in particular had the last publication of a newsletter in 2014. This school in particular seemed disconnected from the larger vision of the school district and there was minimal focus on family engagement or PWR. As a result, families from this school were frustrated with the lack of opportunity to be engaged at the school or the lack of communication received in their spoken language.

Families with students in ECE indicated that they received communication in English and Spanish. The ECE school website also supported this claim. Often on the other school websites there was inconsistency with documents that were uploaded. They were uploaded in English and sometimes, a Spanish version would also be uploaded. In the ECE, however, the website tabs were clearly marked for families and information was available in both Spanish and English. Documents on all the websites were not uploaded in any other language. Though the websites had a language conversion software so that families could select their desired language, the software did not automatically convert documents which were uploaded in Word or PDF formats.

In instances where the communication was regular and up to date, it was an acknowledgment of valuing time for families. Knowing that time was important to families, there seems to be some consideration in making particular links or documents vivid and accessible, such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, Individual Career and Academic Plan, Advancement Via Individual Determination, Career and Technical Education, and scholarships. This was exceptionally valid as families many times had students across multiple school levels. Not all the information was in dual language. However, being able to access information quickly about their students reduced the frustration around communication. Families interviewed from the schools that targeted their information in this respect were more satisfied with the communication level at the schools.

Another theme that carried over into the documents was the use of the word *parents*. All documents analyzed used this terminology. While the word *family* was

mentioned, follow up statements would use *parents*. For example, the handbook sometimes used parent/guardian but was not consistent throughout to acknowledge the other family members that are engaged in the educational process of their students. The same inconsistencies were evident in the district's Strategic Plan and the PWR Strategic Plan. The use of parents and parent involvement was also strongly associated with school-centric activities as was mentioned in the interviews. An example can be seen in the full description given for parent involvement in one of the handbooks:

**Parent Involvement** - At CSS (pseudonym), we are a learning community, and as such, we value and need parental involvement. First and foremost, please know that we invite and welcome your presence, input, questions, and suggestions. If you would like to visit your child's classes, please know that you are always welcome to do so. If you would like to share an area of expertise or a skill or resource that you have or simply help with a party or field trip, please let us know and we will be happy to find a way to utilize your expertise. If you would like to be a SAC (School Advisory Committee) or DAC (District Advisory Committee) representative, please speak to your child's homeroom teacher so we can benefit from your perspectives. If you have concerns about your child's progress or any aspect of their school experience, feel free to make an appointment to speak with his or her homeroom teacher or the subject area teacher in which you have the concern to resolve the issue. We want every student and every family member to feel that they are a vital part of this learning community called CSS and most importantly, we want every student to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially during their years at CSS. As a faculty, we value the trust you place in us to provide your child with the best educational experience possible. We aim to deliver and we have a very successful history of providing students with the absolute best academic and leadership education available in Colorado.

As can be observed in this same excerpt, there is an open call welcoming families into the CSS community and inviting their input and participation. In contrast to this open call, the handbook was only available in English which inadvertently excludes families speaking other languages. There was only one family interviewed from this school. The family felt as though they were able to resolve issues with teachers concerning their

student and felt that the school was responsive and open. The family also confirmed that there was an emphasis on developing their student and preparing him for PWR. Maria and Chad commented in the following way:

So, for middle school, right now, they are transitioning to the high school. They are letting—they're kind of giving the kids an idea of what is to come. They will explain to them—we had an orientation where he would explain, 'If you want to go to college, or you should go to college, and the reason why it is you get better opportunities. You are able to make more money, depending on the career that you choose. Not just that, education is very important.' So they've done a few things, and then they have gotten them ready. They do the—what are those called, the classes that you do I was talking about—honors. That's what they call them here, honors. So they are helping them with college credits already.

There are other media on the websites which conveyed the theme of preparation for PWR and developing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. In particular videos communicating about the schools to families and the community, several catch phrases could be heard from the videos:

- a. "Collaborating, problem-solving" – *Superintendent*
- b. "We are really preparing them for the 21<sup>st</sup> century" – *Teacher*
- c. "The future is amazing for this district. It is so exciting to know that our community here supports our school district and that we are able to now offer state of the art facilities for every single student in our district." – *Superintendent*



Some school websites were more forthcoming with PWR information than others, and administrators revealed in the interviews the desire to have more information available on websites. The videos also conveyed that administrators and teachers believed that their schools were “amazing places that feel like family” (Superintendent) or that “this is such a caring community” (Teacher). There was a concerted effort throughout the documents analyzed to communicate a sense of care, thereby an effort to make families feel welcome.

Overall, the challenge remained evident in the documents examined that the language was not always inclusive in considering all family members engaged in preparing students for postsecondary pursuits. There were inconsistencies in communication across different languages. Wherever there was an effort made to update information, documents would be uploaded in multiple languages, links would be accessible and easy to navigate. In addition, documents were also not always current, therefore presenting a breakdown in communication. In such instances, families felt as though they had to seek out the necessary information.

### **Summary of Chapter Five**

The findings of this study resulted in five major categories with subsequent themes. The study found that there were varied perceptions in the definition of family engagement in PWR. As the first category evolved—perception of family engagement versus parent involvement—stakeholders described family engagement as activity-based, value-based, whole-family-based, partnership-based, and support-based. The researcher further found that all stakeholders had hopes and dreams for their students which resulted

in the second category. The hopes and dreams centered on the themes feel welcomed, prepared for the world, doors of opportunities, and be somebody.

Countering these hopes and dreams were the barriers experienced for families to be engaged in PWR. Therefore, the third category examining barriers exposed that time and work, communication to families, and self-efficacy were the three main themes that emerged. Preparation for PWR developed as the fourth category with three emerging themes: awareness of programs, skills needed, and funds of knowledge. The final and fifth category focused on the role of stakeholders in the school district. The roles were overlapping though they were carried out differently based on role. The themes in this fifth category were to provide support, believe in students, and set the culture.

The findings presented in this chapter triangulated data obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis. The researcher was open to both convergent and divergent information, and therefore found that the perceptions of family engagement in PWR from various stakeholders in the school district identified multiple ways that families and schools support their students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Chapter Six will discuss these findings, their implications, and make future recommendations.

## Chapter Six: Discussion

*I think everything is connected. Everything, you know, life, work and school.*

*Everything has to be in sync. In order for it to flow, it's like a big wheel. You have to have all the parts in life, because if you have been exceling in life but not doing any school... you know. Or you're doing great in school, but you don't have that social aspect outside of school, where are you going to be?*

—Brenda

### Introduction

In this instrumental case study, the researcher sought a deeper understanding of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness by examining the perceptions of stakeholders in the Constant Spring School District. The researcher sought to gather a cross-section of perspectives and experiences from the Superintendent, Director of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness, principals, teachers and families. Understanding was sought regarding the definition of family engagement in PWR, hopes and dreams that stakeholders had for students, barriers to engagement that were experienced, and perceived roles of the stakeholders in the PWR. As such, the researcher examined attitudes, values, feelings, and experiences relative to the phenomenon.

Using the theoretical framework, The Model of Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (FEPWR) (see Figure 3), and the literature review, Chapter Six will present a discussion on the findings, implications, recommendations, and areas for future research. However, the chapter will begin with an overview of the research purpose and research question. This final chapter will synthesize the research in a way that provides practical and tangible action steps that continue to consider the perception of all stakeholders who are engaged in supporting students in postsecondary and workforce readiness on a P-20 continuum.

### **Overview**

There continues to be a growing need to raise academic expectations and foster a postsecondary and workforce readiness culture in schools and districts for every student. In order to adequately prepare students for postsecondary education and workforce readiness, investing in families as resources is being recognized as an impactful element in education, especially for underrepresented communities (Auerbach, 2004; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Research has long confirmed a relationship between family engagement, student achievement, school readiness and graduation rates (Englund et al., 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hossler, et al., 1999; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Weiss et al., 2009). Postsecondary and workforce readiness is a component of student achievement, school readiness and, in fact, graduation rates in schools and districts. As such, the researcher realized the importance of exploring the element of PWR and how families were engaged in that aspect for the Constant Spring School District. Family engagement in PWR is an intersection that lacks exploration.

Families play a key role in students' levels of preparation for PWR pathways. As the purpose of this research was to examine family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness, the key question at the center of this study was, "What are the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in a suburban school district?" By exploring this question and embarking on this study, the researcher was able to identify challenges and opportunities as the perceptions of various stakeholders were examined. This study was, therefore, significant in that it highlighted the opportunity that school districts have to develop partnerships that are reciprocal and that lead to a culture of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness by examining, and valuing the perceptions of various stakeholders.

## **Discussion**

Several observations were drawn from the analysis of the data collected during this research study. As the researcher reviewed the categories, themes, and sub-themes in light of the theoretical framework (FEPWR) and the literature review presented in Chapter Two, the recursive and complex nature of family engagement in PWR was evident. Chapter Three proposed the FEPWR Model and indicated that each quadrant in the model should not be considered separately. The model was purposefully not developed as a tiered, linear or cyclical framework so that families, schools, and school districts could understand that factors, forms, co-construction and outcomes are recurrent and multifaceted. In other words, a single quadrant does not occur in its entirety before moving on to accomplish the goals of the other quadrant. Table 6 shows an integration of

the categories, themes, and sub-themes in the FEPWR theoretical framework. The integration is based on the data gathered in the interviews, observations and document analysis. The fact that the categories, themes, and sub-themes overlap in each sphere suggest how family engagement in PWR is abstrusely intertwined. The following section will discuss the findings through each quadrant of the theoretical framework.

Table 6

*Integration of Categories and Themes into The Model of Family Engagement in PWR*

Category	Themes	Sub-themes	Factors influencing Family Engagement	Forms of Family Engagement	Co-construction of Engagement P-20	Outcomes for families, schools & school districts
Category One: Perception of Family Engagement versus Parent Involvement	Activity-based		X	X		
	Value-based		X	X	X	
	Whole-family-based		X	X		
	Partnership-based		X	X	X	
	Support-based		X	X	X	
Category Two: Hopes and Dreams	Feel Welcomed		X		X	1. Increased student achievement.
	Prepared for the World				X	2. Increased aspirations for postsecondary pursuits.
	Doors of Opportunities		X		X	3. Increased self-efficacy.
Category Three: Barriers to Family Engagement	Be Somebody				X	4. Improved communication.
	Time and Work		X			5. Shift in cultural values.
	Communication to Families		X		X	6. Building of capacity for all stakeholders.
	Self-efficacy		X		X	7. More inclusive environments.
Category Four: Preparation for PWR	Awareness of Programs		X		X	
	Skills Needed	Respeto 21st Century Skills	X		X	
	Funds of Knowledge		X	X	X	
Category Five: Role of Stakeholders	Provide Support		X	X	X	
	Believe in Students		X	X	X	
	Set the Culture		X	X	X	

**Factors influencing family engagement.** The theoretical framework directs schools and districts to examine the factors influencing family engagement. The first quadrant of the FEPWR Model calls for an examination of perceptions held by families about what family engagement is (e.g. Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Kim, 2009; Koonce & Harper, 2005; Leiber-Miller, 2012), perceptions held by educators about what they perceive as family engagement (e.g. Hill & Torres, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Lawson, 2003; McWayne et al., 2016; Okagaki & Bingham, 2010), and invitation to be engaged (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010) among others. As the researcher explored perceptions of what family engagement in PWR looked like for the various stakeholders, the findings revealed that schools and the school district were operating from a deficit paradigm that narrowly defined the role of families and how they were engaged in preparing students for postsecondary pursuits (Mapp & Hong, 2010). The limitation of the language, for example using *involvement* rather than *engagement*, operationalized educators' perspectives as more school-centric (Lawson, 2003). The interviews with stakeholders who were administrators and teachers were therefore more *activity-based* rather than *value-based*, *whole-family-based*, *partnership-based*, or *support-based*. Families, on the other hand, perceived their engagement in all these themes. This variance in perspectives, therefore, provides an opportunity for the school district to collaborate with families to minimize the disparate perceptions.

Obvious in the findings was the fact that the lives of families are deeply shaped by many cultural facets including life events, race, class, language, and or migrant

inequality. However, the schools and district lacked an understanding of these dynamics as they embraced deficit approaches which were not culturally responsive (Baquedano-López, 2013; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). For example, the lack of communication available, especially to non-English speaking populations, was constantly referred to as a barrier by all stakeholders. Another barrier is that of time and work which impacted the engagement of families in events that occurred during normal work hours. If families were unable to attend these events, they were seen as disinterested or disengaged from their child's schooling (Delgado Gaitan, 2012). Viewing family engagement in this regard supports a deficit-based perception and conforms to a more conventional definition (Delgado Gaitan, 2012). Being aware of these barriers between educators and families and engaging in proactive strategies to address them is a way to leverage further family engagement in PWR (Leiber-Miller; 2012; McWayne et al., 2016).

In addition, the findings revealed that families had the expectation that their students were treated with respect and dignity, that their cultural heritage was considered, and that their home environments were recognized as contributions to the learning environment and PWR preparation. Teachers and administrators should therefore realize that there is a need for schools and school districts to honor cultures and funds of knowledge. However, knowledge gained about the students' homes should not be used as a relic but should be an avenue that enriches the curriculum and strengthens the partnership with families (Delgado Gaitan, 2012). In other words, it is not enough to have students bring pictures of their families which are then framed and placed in the classrooms. Rather, teachers could examine how these pictures could be incorporated in



discussions and activities throughout the school year in a way that acknowledges and values the rich, cultural heritage students bring to the classroom. The funds of knowledge approach will position educators as co-constructors in the preparation of students (González et al., 2005).

The literature made reference to families who lacked self-efficacy as being less engaged (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010). It was alarming that families who were perceived as lacking self-efficacy, such as a lower education level or socio-economic status, did not see their lack as a hindrance in engagement and preparing their students for postsecondary pursuits. For some families in this study, they had less education and experienced language differences; however, they still wanted to be engaged in the education of their students (Murray et al., 2014). Contrary to the literature, they desired to use their lack of efficacy to bolster the success of their students. Even in the face of negative experiences, families expressed little reticence with interacting with the schools (Murray et al., 2014).

Factors influencing family engagement differed based on the roles and perceptions of the stakeholders. Some of these factors emerged as barriers to engagement while others served to strengthen approaches with families in the PWR process.

**Forms of family engagement.** The second quadrant acknowledges that family engagement takes different forms, both from the perspectives of the families and perspectives of educators to include teachers, principals, and school district personnel. This research study advocates for a more inclusive definition of family engagement that recognizes values, goals and aspirations, engagement at home, engagement at school,

communication from home to school and school district, and from school and school district to home. The varied forms of family engagement in this quadrant minimize bias and the tendency for educators to privilege particular forms of engagement over others as observed in “factors influencing family engagement.”

The findings revealed that enough credence was not given by teachers and administrators to the ways in which families were engaged at home and even in the school environment. Noticeable in the findings was the tremendous emphasis placed on the *value-based* aspect of engagement for families which is a psychological variable. This finding was an unanticipated outcome. However, it became well-defined as the researcher considered the importance of interpersonal relationships as a central factor behind family engagement in education (Green et al., 2007). Schools and school districts must have a general awareness of these psychological variables so that they can be responsive (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010). A culturally relevant response will trigger partnerships between families and educators that are more intrinsic in nature and which consider aspirations, modeling, encouragement—all variables perceived by family participants to be their version of engagement. Research has shown for many years that families and other stakeholders do play a key factor in influencing and supporting students’ aspirations in PWR (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Hallett & Griffen, 2015; Hossler et al., 1999; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). Therefore, there is value in encouraging and supporting the aspirations of families to form early positive postsecondary attitudes (Raleigh & Kao, 2010).

One of the key findings in this study centered on communication. All stakeholders held that there was significant room for improvement with communication as a channel of establishing more meaningful relationships. Communication was often conventional, and unidirectional and reciprocal practices were lacking (Ishimaru, 2017). Evident in the poor communication existent in the school district was the effort to give voice to families who felt undervalued in this process. Even though families felt that their voices were lacking, the district was cognizant and making small strides to improve communication. Principals reported efforts to send out daily or weekly communication to families, while the district administrators reported efforts to employ language services for major community meetings, and student/family meetings with principals or teachers.

However, it is not sufficient that only small strides are undertaken to address issues of communication. Underlying structural barriers must be examined. While communication was not discussed as a central theme in the literature review, the factors influencing family engagement, such as the perceptions of stakeholders, relationship building, addressing problems about students, and language barriers consistently pointed to the need for effective communication as a form of family engagement.

It is critical that strong efforts are continuously made towards improving communication that is reciprocal. In other words, communication should be from school or school district to home but also from home to school or the school district. This will allow for families, teachers, and administrators to feel informed. Knowledge creates advocacy and plays a critical role in shaping the learning environment of students. From the context of their homes, students have learned the language and culture of their

families such as attitudes, norms, practices, beliefs, experiences, and aspirations (Delgado Gaitan, 2012; González et al., 2005).

**Co-construction of family engagement.** The third quadrant places emphasis on family engagement as a co-constructed process. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) refers to this co-construction as a shared partnership. The quadrant recognizes that families and educators can be engaged in PWR for students through modeling, encouragement, advocacy, instruction, decision-making and other supportive roles. The relationship is not solely dependent on the academic setting, on the home construction, or the social setting. Rather, family engagement defines a reciprocal relationship between administrators, teachers, and family in a way that adds value to all stakeholders engaged in the process.

As a result, relationships between stakeholders are equally important. Families, schools, and school districts should therefore recognize their complementary roles in the educational success of students (Weiss et al., 2010). This was evident in the findings. Though the roles were different, stakeholders saw each other performing similar functions. For example, all stakeholders perceived others as providing support. The district provided support by making resources available to schools, while principals provided support by casting the vision for families and staff. Families also provided support to students as they prepared them for PWR. In this respect, family engagement in PWR becomes a shared responsibility that promotes the growth and achievement of students.

It was perceived that the hopes and dreams of families for students to be successful were sometimes shaped by their racial experiences (Baquedano-López, 2013).

Another aspect raised in the findings was practices of inequity. These practices left families feeling excluded and frustrated. Racialized families explicitly stated they wanted the same opportunities for their families as their White counterparts. They wanted to know that their students would be equally successful in PWR. Hence, families wanted information that would help them to be more knowledgeable to support their student's learning. These families were essentially experiencing cultural barriers related to race and socioeconomic status (SES). Higher socioeconomic and White middle-class families have the resources which enable them to advocate and seek advantages for their children (Englund et al., 2004; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). On the other hand, minoritized families, and lower SES families are less informed, have less access to resources and, in general, experience more challenges (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Minke & Anderson, 2005; Trotman, 2001; William & Sánchez, 2011). Henderson and Mapp (2002) noted that families want to be recognized as equal partners. Regardless of race or SES, families did encourage their students to succeed and expressed a willingness to partner with teachers and administrators.

**Outcomes for families, schools, and school districts.** The last quadrant observes the outcomes not just for schools, but identifies that there are also outcomes for school districts, and families. The outcomes demonstrate a sustained system that brings value to all the stakeholders engaged in PWR. By explicitly stating that the outcomes relate to families, schools and school districts, the language immediately becomes more inclusive and does not favor teachers only as mentioned in previous models. The quadrant also points to a co-constructed partnership where the outcomes relate to all stakeholders and

encourage vested interests. Often, the nucleus of family engagement frameworks demonstrates outcomes for students and families while only implying the other outcomes for schools and school districts. This can be observed in the frameworks presented in Chapter Three. Stakeholders are more likely to engage if they recognize that the outcomes relate to their roles and to the larger vision and mission of the school district.

Since this study was qualitative, drew on a smaller sample size, and occurred over a limited time frame, it was not possible to obtain empirical evidence on how these quadrants realized the outcomes for families, schools and the school district. However, it has been well researched that family engagement positively influences student achievement (Bornstein, 2006; Dearing & Tang, 2010; Englund et al., 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2010) and that family engagement influences post high school aspirations (Auerbach, 2004; Becerra, 2012; Gonzalez, 2012; Kirk et al., 2011; McWayne & Melzi, 2014; Redding, Murphy & Sheley, 2011; Tierney & Auerbach, 2004). The researcher has established, then, that family engagement is likely to have positive outcomes in postsecondary and workforce readiness. Table 7 lists only a few outcomes that could be experienced through family engagement in PWR but which point to the major findings in the study. Consistent with what the FEPWR Model seeks to promote, family engagement in PWR is a recursive and complex process that is not exclusive of any single variable. The same theory occurs with the outcomes in the FEPWR Model. Family engagement as a co-constructed partnership will stand to benefit all stakeholders engaged in the process.

Table 7

*Possible Outcomes for Families, Schools, and School Districts*

Possible Outcomes	Possible Stakeholder to be Affected by Outcome		
	Family	School	School District
1. Increased student achievement	X	X	X
2. Increased aspirations for postsecondary pursuits	X	X	X
3. Increased self-efficacy	X	X	X
4. Improved communication	X	X	X
5. Shift in cultural values	X	X	X
6. Building of capacity for all stakeholders	X	X	X
7. More inclusive environments	X	X	X

**Postsecondary and workforce readiness.** All four components discussed previously point to PWR because they essentially shape how students pursue postsecondary options with the support of their families and educators. In addition, schools and school districts are able to identify how they may develop and sustain an increased postsecondary and workforce readiness partnership. The school district has some obvious gaps in preparing students for postsecondary and workforce readiness. One such gap is the lack of knowledge that exists among families. It was surprising to find that families had a negative perception of PWR programs. Even though they perceived their form of engagement as setting up their students for success and preparing them for postsecondary pursuits, they did not envision those future pursuits as ones being outside of college. It means that the district would need to address the other quadrants in order to construct a plan that properly markets PWR to families, teachers, and administrators.

## **Implications**

This study has implications for local, state, and federal policy. As mentioned in the statement of the problem in Chapter One, school districts need to explore and develop a culture around family engagement that is targeted towards postsecondary and workforce readiness. Their practices have to be geared towards a more systemic and process-oriented definition of developing a culture of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness. Family engagement in PWR requires a vision and framework that will shift policy and practice.

The first implication addresses the need to create a welcoming environment in schools and the school district at large. A welcoming environment does not only speak to the physical setting of schools. Administrators and teachers should be aware that for families to feel welcomed, the curriculum should also reflect inclusivity. Families of color should be able to see the same PWR opportunities for their students as there are for their White counterparts.

In addition, schools should consider the negative implication of hiring all White teachers and administrators. Families already have to contend with the fact that the majority of administrators and teachers are White and do not reflect their cultural diversity in who they are as individuals. This was evident in the fact that every administrator and teacher interviewed for this study identified as White. The literature also points to the fact that teachers in kindergarten through high school are relatively a homogenous group (Okagaki & Bingham, 2010). Having to encounter a curriculum that lacks inclusivity and a fairly homogenous staff presents further barriers for families to be



engaged and integrated in the system. Therefore, an important part of any outreach effort would be to help all underrepresented populations to feel welcome and comfortable in the school (McWayne, Melzi, Limlingan & Schick, 2016).

Barriers to family engagement are often found in other school practices. Families spoke about the schedule regarding the times for parent teacher conferences or school events. If schools continue to host events and meetings at times that are not accommodating to families, then they will continue to be perceived as disinterested and not engaged in the academic environment of their students. The current study found that when schools were willing to adjust schedules for meetings and events that considered the work schedules of families, the response rate was higher and families were more receptive. Therefore, schools and school districts should examine such practices. By extension, district leaders will need to be systematic in uncovering institutionalized policies, practices, and guidelines that prevent such barriers from being removed.

From a policy perspective, district, state, and federal leaders will need to consider the multiple ways in which families are engaged in preparing their students for postsecondary pursuits. In addition, they will need to recognize that the concept of *family* exceeds the conventional definition of the nuclear family anymore, and become more robust in finding innovative ways to engage all families in PWR. An identification of these facts will begin to shape PWR frameworks that acknowledge families as integral in the process. As Robert, the high school principal stated:

And then it all starts with the family. I mean, the family is ground zero. The family is the one constant. The family is who that kid's going to be together from

the day they were born, well beyond any sort of education they're going to get here. So that needs to be the constant. And those core values and those core ideals and those core things have to start in the family... family's ground zero where everything has to start.

Since families provide the foundational support students need to prepare for PWR, states should look to incorporate core competencies that are specific to family engagement in their policies so that there is support for stakeholders to implement effective practices. Family-focused policies or programs cannot be a matter of only endorsing the impact and importance of family engagement, but these considerations should be addressed in policy, program development, implementation, and evaluations (Bogenschneider et al., 2012).

### **Recommendations**

After analyzing the data gathered for this research, there are a number of recommendations relevant to the school district as it considers family engagement in PWR. The recommendations take into consideration the various forms of family engagement, barriers, roles and aspirations as expressed by the stakeholders in the study.

**Market PWR.** The mission outlined in the district's strategic plan to graduate the leaders, thinkers, and explorers of tomorrow will need to be emphasized. In so doing, PWR should become a disciplined focus for all stakeholders because it will consider the preparation process. The aim to graduate needs to take into account the process to achieve this goal. Not only should students graduate but they should be ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century whether they pursue a college degree, diploma or certificate programs or transition directly into the workforce. Therefore, all stakeholders must think beyond the

graduation stage to what happens after high school. Considering that families had an exception or bias towards PWR programs, the school district would be well advised to think about how PWR is marketed to families. While all students may not go to college, it is essential to show the value in other postsecondary options and clearly define what it means to be postsecondary and workforce ready. If families understand PWR is a preparation process, and that other options outside of college are not lesser than, they may be more open to their students pursuing these choices.

The district should keep in mind that often times, a college degree is seen as a ticket out of poverty, especially for first-generation graduates. Therefore, families from a lower socio-economic status will emphasize that their students should obtain a college degree. At the same time, the school district needs to balance expectations for students. Families desire to know that their students are valued and that expectations for their success are extremely high from teachers and administrators in the educational environment.

A radical paradigm shift that the school district should consider then is changing the terminology *postsecondary and workforce readiness*. Families were ill-disposed to the mention of PWR. The phrase has underlying implications which suggest that White students go to college and other underrepresented students enter the workforce, typically in jobs that do not need a college qualifications such as skilled, industrial work. Families would rather seek higher education as it is perceived as an opportunity to improve career goals, to obtain economic success and social mobility (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Initiatives by the school district will continue to fail if stakeholders persist in operating

from a deficit-based approach because the interpretation of PWR by families stands in complete contrast to the intent of the school district. Therefore, in collaborating with families and incorporating their voices, the school district could explore what are the terminologies or references that are more inclusive and that families will readily embrace. It will be a unique opportunity for the school district to recognize, from the perspective of families, how PWR should be marketed.

The terminology used in PWR marketing material and strategic plans distributed to families is also important. If the terminologies such as *family* and *parent*, or *engagement* and *involvement* remain inconsistent and the language occurs primarily in English, the school district will be ignoring the inclusive definition of family engagement that recognizes all family members engaged in the postsecondary pursuits of students. It will also fail to acknowledge the forms of engagement at home, engagement at school, values, goals, and aspirations of families in the school district.

Since Colorado is not only focused on postsecondary and workforce readiness in the state, but also making efforts to focus on partnership with families in education, the state should consider how PWR is perceived by families as it continues to formulate policy and recommend practices to school districts. Though this study was not focused on examining the state policies on PWR in depth, there was some recognition that Career and Technical Education (CTE) has significant emphasis in PWR. This feeds into the misconception that families have regarding PWR and their aspirations for their students. Therefore, policymakers will need to examine terminologies, target best practices and strategies that will support and encourage family engagement in PWR.

**Promote value-added family engagement.** The district should examine opportunities for less generic programming or activities to encourage family engagement. For example, rethinking the way in which parent teacher conferences are conducted. If parent teacher conferences are merely fifteen-minute sessions with teachers for information to be provided to families, this could be otherwise communicated electronically, especially when time is such a valuable commodity for families and was reported as one of the more significant barriers to engagement at school. Rather, a session that takes time to gather information about families, and which allow families to share their experiences, and ask questions might encourage a more participatory relationship. The notion of this partnership denotes more meaningful consultation and collaboration (Baquedano-López, 2013).

Families also had a vision of what a value-added partnership would resemble. They expressed that while they were grateful for services offered, they wanted schools and districts to invest in them as a person. For example, the district encouraged the completion of General Education Degree classes for families with students in preschool. This was well received and appreciated by families. Another example was that families wished for classes on time management and work-life balance. These value-added practices have further implications on family engagement in PWR such as building capacity with families and other stakeholders. Susan, the Superintendent, agreed with this recommendation when she proposed that it should be a consideration:

How do we create events that the whole family is involved in, or participates in, or opportunities-- not necessarily even events, but opportunities or

communications that then adds value to the family as a whole, the family unit, not just, ‘Oh, now this parent knows this, that, or the other thing,’ but this is a value add for all members of that family moving forward: the children, the parents, the siblings.

Value-added practices around family engagement in PWR will also encourage equal access to post-secondary education and workforce skills for all families and their students. It becomes a process that gives families a collective efficacy in making choices about attending college, pursuing other postsecondary options, and developing the necessary skills needed (Kirk et al., 2011).

**Celebrate families.** Every single stakeholder in this research study expressed a desire for students to succeed. The *activity-based* engagement practice that was most valued by stakeholders was the celebration of students and their families. Administrators and teachers were emotional about events such as graduation, homecoming parade, and other such events. For them, there was a culminating effect where they saw that all the hard work students had invested was achieved. Families on the other hand saw these occasions as opportunities for their students to be celebrated, as well as a chance to build relationships with other families, administrators, and teachers. The school district should consider how best to maximize these events for families to feel engaged in the process, and for teachers and administrators to see the culmination of their efforts.

Another way to celebrate families is to ensure that the school physically reflects the ethnicities and languages of the students attending. Although the hallways were lined with PWR artifacts, renown quotes, and artwork by students and families, there was

minimal display of the cultural diversity represented in the schools, neither were the artifacts characterized in multiple languages. A culturally relevant response to family engagement in PWR should incorporate the knowledge, experiences, language, social networks, and educational attainment of families in the schools (Kiyama, 2010). In so doing, schools and school districts will harvest a co-constructed educational environment where stakeholders are valued.

**Create capacity for all stakeholders.** The Model of Family Engagement in PWR highlights co-constructive relationships. In order for these kinds of partnerships to be developed, it will be vital to train and provide professional development opportunities for stakeholders. In the interviews, principals revealed how they would provide coaching to teachers on how to have phone conversations with families. By providing professional development to teachers and principals, the district will help these stakeholders to build an understanding of best practices in partnerships with families. Building such capacity is crucial as oftentimes teachers and administrators lack the knowledge on best practices for family engagement (Weiss et al., 2010).

In addition, building capacity for families should be a significant consideration. Families revealed in the interviews that they would like help with time management, understanding college admissions processes, and social-emotional coping strategies with their students. Lisa, the ECE Director and Principal confirmed this need when she mentioned her surprise that families were not able to get organized enough to facilitate a thirty-minute home visit. By building capacity for families, the school district will be contributing to value-added family engagement in PWR as well as moving away from the

systemic barriers that families encounter towards engagement. Therefore, in planning activities or performing services that are oriented towards families, the school district should examine how these activities and services are adding value to the whole family.

**Provide dynamic communication.** The school district should consider several aspects of its communication to families. In order to make communication more dynamic, printed and electronic communication should include consistent terminologies. For example, communication should recognize the concept that family is beyond the traditional mother and father and should lessen the use of the word *parents* and utilize the more inclusive term of *families*. In addition, updated information should be available electronically as much as possible since families found this mode of communication efficient and effective. Families were not opposed to email, text messages, social media or phone calls. Therefore, multiple forms of communication should be utilized. Navigation to obtain information should not be complex. Additionally, the schools and district should consider how to consolidate information and or provide an electronic digest so that families are not overwhelmed by all the material received. Families had students across multiple levels and accessing information for several students could become cumbersome if the district is not strategic in its efforts. An overload of information will only serve as a further deterrent to engagement and have further implications.

If the district is focused on making all families feel welcomed and included in the educational process of their students, especially as it relates to PWR, then it will also need to provide communication in multiple languages. While the website allows for



translation in preferred languages, PDF files which are uploaded are often only in English. Families, especially from non-English speaking homes, would feel more included in the educational process if the school district demonstrates and value these populations. Families were typically the ones learning English and maneuvering other language barriers present rather than a co-constructed model of teachers and administrators also learning or providing systems that penetrated the language barriers. In this research, there was only one teacher, outside of families, who was bilingual. Consideration should be given to provide language training to teachers and administrators. Learning a language improves the communication flow and taps into the concept of a shared partnership where all the stakeholders have a vested interest and make equitable efforts to develop the relationship.

Even though the school district under study has a 38% population of students who identify as Hispanic, it should be sensitive to other non-English speakers who are not Hispanic. Therefore, communication, training, and support should be facilitated in other languages as much as possible. A sensitivity to other languages besides Spanish fosters an asset-based mindset. Rather than waiting for the request from families for different languages other than Spanish, the district would be proactive in recognizing and valuing families from varying backgrounds and cultures. This will also build a marketing network for school districts. Families will be drawn to the particular school district because they are aware that their language needs will be valued.

Principals reported that teachers struggled with phone conversations to families. However, the teachers in this research did not report the same. It should be noted that

teachers in this study may not have reported struggling in communication with families because they were in the profession for more than five years. They were more likely to have added experience in communicating with families. Nevertheless, the school district could provide training that targets phone skills for more effective communication with families and that emphasizes strategies for two-way communication. At the same time, teachers and administrators should also be encouraged to make positive contact and communication with families. Calls from school to home should not only be based on negative or behavioral issues. As a form of engagement in PWR, teachers could call families to inquire about their hopes and dreams regarding their students, or perhaps to see whether or not they needed extra support for their students concerning goal-setting, college research or other related PWR matters. In a pervasively digital age, it is easier to employ models of two-way communication, such as providing electronic spaces where families can ask questions or provide feedback on student learning and the development of PWR skills. Administrators should continuously emphasize the importance of making these home-to-school, school-to-home connections as an avenue that is *partnership-based*, which then builds trusting relationships.

An environment that fosters dynamic communication that is positive and constructive will provide the space and opportunity for families to be engaged. It encourages the acknowledgement of multiple forms of communication even in various languages other than Spanish. This system gives voice to all stakeholders and allows them to have a presence in the co-construction of family engagement that is sustained all the way through a student's education and career. Dynamic communication further

addresses the systemic and structural barriers that families face in engagement. The onus and responsibility are therefore moved from the families to make the change in communication in order to be considered engaged.

**Hiring practices.** One systemic change that the school district should examine is the hiring practice of teachers and staff. As discussed in the implications, all teachers, principals, and administrators interviewed in the study identified as White. The school district will experience a missed opportunity if it considers only quality and not the diversity of teachers and staff. Targeted outreach to other ethnic populations should be employed in the hiring process.

### **Areas for Future Research**

The results of this study indicate that there is a need to examine other aspects of family engagement in PWR. The researcher, therefore, recommends exploring funds of knowledge, not only at the preschool level but P-20, as a way to connect family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness. Since families had significant response regarding the values they believe that they brought to the table, it would be useful to explore this concept to the extent that it contributes to the educational success of students and prepares them for postsecondary achievement. Even further, there were social and cultural nuances that were different for Black and Hispanic families. By exploring the funds of knowledge as it relates to different ethnicities could be helpful in engaging families. School districts should therefore recognize household knowledge and activities as significant resources that will impact family engagement in PWR (Tierney, 2002), because the school district would be using what is already existent. Kiyama (2010)

recommends that educators and practitioner should not overlook the inherent resources that families present in students' educational experiences. This exploration would also recognize that families are major stakeholders in postsecondary and workforce readiness.

This study could also be done using other research methods such as quantitative and mixed-methods. By surveying families in the district, and other stakeholders, the school district would be able to gather a larger range of perceptions. In addition, the study could be done as a longitudinal study to see if perceptions about family engagement in PWR change over time. The methodology could also be applied with several school districts, thereby providing an opportunity to compare perceptions and experiences across multiple settings. No doubt, a variety of narratives would emerge about family engagement in PWR. So then, how would these narratives shape the interactions between administrators, teachers, and families?

Also as a quantitative study, student achievement could be explored beyond high school. More specifically, the research could examine the number of students from the district entering postsecondary education, the number of students entering the workforce, the number of students completing postsecondary education, and the impact of family engagement at these different levels. In addition, by conducting a quantitative research study, data-based improvements could be made that could be tracked over time.

One procedural suggestion would be to change the name from parent teacher conferences to a "gathering name" that is more inclusive. While this research did not actively explore if changing the name of events would change the outcome of engagement for families in these events, it opens the door for future research. Beyond the

barriers explored in this research such as time and work and commonly mentioned in the literature, the question as to why families do not attend parent teacher conferences, parent advisory committees, or any other such meeting and events begs to be answered.

Changing the name is an easy fix. However, there are certainly root causes and systemic issues that contribute to low family engagement in these activities. How these activities are tied to postsecondary and workforce readiness is yet to be developed to a level where families are major stakeholders in the process.

Students and community are also stakeholders in the school district. Future studies should be considered with the inclusion of these stakeholders in addition to the stakeholders explored in this study. When students take responsibility for their learning, there is significant possibility for academic and career success. Communities also play a significant role in the support they are able to provide to school districts. Though it may be considered a significantly large research project, it would be beneficial for school districts to explore and understand how these major stakeholders perceive family engagement in PWR. The existing literature in this regard is limited and inconclusive.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In this instrumental case study, the researcher was not seeking a cause and effect relationship, but rather desired a richer and deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The findings of this study expose the experiences and perceptions of numerous stakeholders in a school district who are fundamental to family engagement in PWR. The study reinforces the need to have partnerships that create opportunities for all students—

a foundational tenet of the mission and vision of the school district studied in this research.

Family engagement in PWR presents a myriad of perceptions from the different stakeholders in a school district. Researchers and practitioners need to abandon deficit perspectives that view family engagement in PWR as primarily programmatic. Rather, family engagement in PWR should be seen as a process. It is a platform where all stakeholders share a partnership in preparing their students for postsecondary and workforce readiness. Every stakeholder is vital. More attention must, however, be given to ways in which stakeholders, especially families, are perceived as engaged in PWR so as to develop further investment in the educational process (Auerbach, 2004; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009).

As stakeholders in the schools and school districts begin to understand and value the multiple representations of engagement, they will begin to co-construct meaningful partnerships that support postsecondary and workforce readiness for all students. Engagement, in this respect, conveys a continuum as well as encompasses social, emotional, cultural, and physical participation in the educational process. Even though the term family engagement has circulated for many years, and there is a tendency to think that this may be just another buzz phrase, the terminology has broad implications. It is therefore imperative that the thinking expands by moving from *parent involvement* terminology to *family engagement* in order to build the capacity of families, schools, and school districts. By doing so, educational practices will become more inclusive and will begin to place value on all family members engaged in the educational and postsecondary

process of students while retaining respect and trust in the roles of administrators and teachers. Educational practices will also realize that families continue to play a key role in students' levels of preparation for PWR pathways regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education or cultural backgrounds (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

This study is significant in that it highlights the opportunities for schools and school districts to develop co-constructed relationships leading to a culture of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness. By exploring and valuing the perceptions of each stakeholder across a school district, this study fills a gap in the literature. The study also develops knowledge on family engagement in PWR and provides an advanced framework for exploring and evaluating family engagement in PWR in the school district. In considering the multiple forms in which family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness occurs, this study is groundbreaking as it facilitates and encourages a more inclusive language. It therefore calls on educators and practitioners to be more culturally responsive to the changing educational landscape. The study is significant as it also gives voice to various stakeholders across a school district rather than teachers only, or principals only as demonstrated in previous research. Lastly, this research examines family engagement from the early childhood years and beyond. It is a viable exploration in preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Material Used to Obtain Family Participants

Blurb published in the Constant Spring School District's Newsletter

**Participate in Research and Get a \$5 Gift Card**



UNIVERSITY of  
DENVER

A graduate student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver is inviting families to participate in a research study about family engagement and postsecondary and workforce readiness.

Participants will be asked to do a 45 minute to 1 hour interview for the study, and will receive a \$5 Target gift card.

Read more about the study [here](#) (y en español, [aquí](#).)

Flier Distributed to Families at STEAM Event

# Your voice is needed in Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness



## Get Started Right Away

**What is required:** 40-60 minutes of your time

**When:** A time that fits your schedule.

**Where:** A location that works for you.

**Added bonus:** \$5.00 Target Gift Card.

## What is this about?

I am hoping to gather the perceptions of family members regarding engagement and their understanding of postsecondary and workforce readiness in the school district. The information gathered will be used to complete a dissertation study. No identifiable information will be revealed about participants. The study is completely voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty.

□

**Contact info:** [kayon.morgan@du.edu](mailto:kayon.morgan@du.edu) Cell: 303-910-7927 (call or text)

## Recruitment Letters

March 8, 2017

Dear Families,

My name is Kayon Morgan and I am a graduate student in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness. As a researcher, I am hoping to gather what family members perceive as engagement and their understanding of postsecondary and workforce readiness in the school district.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do an interview which will last about 45 minutes to an hour. You will also be offered a \$5.00 Target Gift Card for your participation. The information gathered in this interview will be used for the completion of a dissertation study towards the award of a graduate degree. All information will be completely confidential and no identifiable information will be revealed in reports.

This is completely voluntary. You may choose to be in this study or not. If you would like to participate, need additional information about the study, and or have further questions, please contact me at 303-910-7927 or email me at [kayon.morgan@du.edu](mailto:kayon.morgan@du.edu).

Please check the box below if a translator will be needed for the interview. The interview will be offered in Spanish if needed.

☐

Translator needed for interview (Spanish only)

With appreciation,

Kayon Morgan  
PhD Candidate  
Morgridge College of Education  
University of Denver

8 de Marzo, 2017

Queridas Familias,

Mi nombre es Kayon Morgan y soy una estudiante de posgrado en el Colegio de Educacion Morgridge en la Universidad de Denver. Les escribo para invitarles a participar en mi estudio de investigación sobre la participación de la familia en la preparación para la educación superior y la fuerza de trabajo. Como investigadora, espero reunir percepciones de los miembros de familia sobre su participacion y entendimiento de la preparación para la educación superior y la fuerza de trabajo en el distrito escolar.

Si decide participar en esta investigación, se le pedirá que realice una entrevista que durará aproximadamente entre 45 minutos y una hora. También se le ofrecerá una tarjeta de regalo de \$ 5.00 por su participación. La información colectada en esta entrevista será utilizará para la realización de un estudio de tesis para la concesión de un título de posgrado. Toda la información será completamente confidencial y ninguna información identificable será revelada en los reportes.

Esto es completamente voluntario. Usted puede elegir participar en esta investigacion o no. Si desea participar, necesita información adicional sobre la investigacion, o si tiene más preguntas, póngase en contacto conmigo al \_\_\_\_\_ o envíeme un correo electrónico a [kayon.morgan@du.edu](mailto:kayon.morgan@du.edu).

Por favor, marque la casilla de abajo si necesita un traductor para la entrevista. La entrevista se ofrecerá en Español si es necesario.

☐

Traductor necesario para la entrevista (entrevista sólo en Español)

Con apreciación,

Kayon Morgan  
Candidata de Doctorado  
Colegio de Educacion Morgridge  
Universidad de Denver

## Appendix B: Consent Forms

University of Denver  
Consent Form for Participation in Research

**Title of Research Study:** Family Engagement in Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness in a Suburban School District: An Exploratory Study

**Researcher:** Keisha Kayon Morgan

**Faculty Sponsor:** Kristina Hesbol, PhD

### Study Site:

#### Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions held by various stakeholders regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in a suburban school district.

#### Procedures

If you consent to be part of this research study, you will be invited to participate in an interview. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

#### Voluntary Participation

Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to **answer any question during the interview** for any reason without penalty or other benefits to which you are entitled.

#### Risks or Discomforts

The researcher has taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Even so, as a participant, you may still experience some risks related to feelings that may be evoked from questions being asked in the interview. The study may include other risks that are unknown at this time. If, however, you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable at any time to answer a question, you may decline to answer the question or end the interview. You may also choose to withdraw from the study. There will be no penalty, no negative consequences, and no removal of other benefits to which you are entitled if you decline to answer any question, end the interview, or withdraw from the study.

#### Benefits

While there may not be any other direct benefit to your participation in this research study, you may benefit indirectly because students in the school district will receive added support from the district to succeed in postsecondary and workforce readiness. As a participant in this study, you may feel valued as your voice will be given a forum to be heard. You may also learn how to understand, interpret, and identify opportunities for family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness.

#### Incentives to participate

You will receive a **\$5.00 Target Gift Card** for participating in this research project.

**Study Costs (if applicable)**

You will not be expected to pay any costs associated with the study.

**Confidentiality**

The researcher will **make all efforts to keep your information private. There will be no identifiable information used with this study and a pseudonym will be used** to keep your information safe throughout this study. Your individual identity will also be kept private if information is presented or published about this study. The name of the school district will also be kept confidential and a pseudonym will be used.

The data you provide will be stored on a password-protected software. The researcher will destroy the original data once it has been transcribed and the study is completed. The analysis of these data may be made available to the school district, but will not contain information that could identify you. Voices or images that will be recorded during the duration of this study will be accessed by the researcher for education purposes only.

The results from this research will be used to complete a dissertation research. It may be used for future presentation and or publication, but there will be no identifiable information and all your information will be kept private. The information of the school district will also be kept private in any report.

However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. The research information may be shared with federal agencies or local committees who are responsible for protecting research participants.

**Member checking**

I will follow-up with you throughout the writing of the report to ensure that your opinion, experiences and ideas are accurately reflected. If you do not agree to quotes or other results arising being included, even anonymously, please tell the researcher.

**Questions**

If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact **Kayon Morgan** at **303-910-7927** and or **kayon.morgan@du.edu** at any time.

**Options for Participation**

Please initial your choice for the options below:

- ☐ The researcher may audio record me during this study.
- ☐ The researcher may video record me during this study.
- ☐ The researcher may photograph me during this study.
- ☐ The researcher may NOT audio record me during this study.
- ☐ The researcher may NOT video record me during this study.
- ☐ The researcher may NOT photograph me during this study.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant's Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**



Universidad de Denver  
Formulario de Consentimiento para Participar en la Investigación

**Título del Estudio de Investigación:** Participación Familiar en la Preparación Postsecundaria y Fuerza de Trabajo en una Escuela Suburbana del Distrito Escolar: Un Estudio Exploratorio.

**Investigadora:** Keisha Kayon Morgan

**Profesorado Patrocinador:** Kristina Hesbol, PhD

**Lugar del Estudio:** Distrito Escolar Público de Englewood

**Objetivo**

Se le pedirá participar en un estudio exploratorio. El objetivo de esta investigación es explorar las percepciones que se mantienen por las partes interesadas en cuanto a la participación familiar en la preparación postsecundaria y de fuerza de trabajo en una escuela suburbana del distrito.

**Procedimientos**

Si usted da su consentimiento para ser parte de este estudio exploratorio, se le invitará a participar en una entrevista. La entrevista durará aproximadamente 60 minutos.

**Participación voluntaria**

La participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria. Aún si decide participar ahora, podrá cambiar de opinión y detenerse en cualquier momento. Puede escoger no **contestar ninguna pregunta durante la entrevista** sin ninguna razón de penalidad u otros beneficios de los cuales usted tiene derecho.

**Riesgos de Molestias**

La investigadora ha tomado los pasos para minimizar los riesgos del estudio. Aún así, como participante, podría experimentar algunos riesgos relacionados a los sentimientos que se podrán provocar por parte de las preguntas que se realizarán en la entrevista. El estudio puede incluir otros riesgos que son desconocidos hasta el momento. Si, no obstante, se siente avergonzado(a) o incómodo(a) en cualquier momento de contestar una pregunta, puede rechazar contestar la pregunta o dar por terminada la entrevista. También puede escoger retirarse del estudio. No habrá ninguna penalidad o consecuencias negativas o perderá ningún beneficio de los cuales tiene derecho, si rechaza contestar alguna pregunta, culminar la entrevista o retirarse del estudio.

**Beneficios**

Aunque no exista ningún beneficio directo de su participación en este estudio de investigación, se podría beneficiar indirectamente debido a que los estudiantes en la escuela del distrito recibirán apoyo adicional del distrito para tener éxito en la preparación postsecundaria y de fuerza de trabajo. Como participante de este estudio, podría sentirse valorado(a) debido a que su voz se le dará foro para que sea escuchado. También podría aprender cómo entender, interpretar e identificar las oportunidades de participación familiar en la preparación postsecundaria y laboral.

**Incentivos para Participar**

Recibirá una **Gift Card de Target valorada en \$5.00** por la participación en este proyecto de investigación.

**Costos de Estudio (si procede)**

No se esperará que usted pague ningún costo asociado con el estudio.

**Confidencialidad**

La investigadora **hará todos los esfuerzos posibles para mantener su información privada. No habrá ninguna información identificable usada en este estudio y será usado un seudónimo** para mantener segura su información a lo largo de este estudio. Su identidad individual también se mantendrá privada si se

presenta o publica información sobre este estudio. El nombre de la escuela del distrito también se mantendrá en secreto y se usará un seudónimo.

Los datos que usted proporcione serán guardados en un software protegido con contraseña. La investigadora destruirá los datos originales una vez se haya transcrito y el estudio haya terminado. El análisis de estos datos podrían hacerse disponible a la escuela del distrito, pero no contendrá información que lo(a) pueda indentificar. Las voces o imágenes que se grabarán durante la duración de este estudio serán accedidos por la investigadora solo con fines educativos.

Los resultados de esta investigación serán usados para completar una investigación doctoral. Podrían ser usados en presentaciones o publicaciones a futuro, pero no habrá información identificable y toda su información se mantendrá en secreto. La información de la escuela del distrito también se mantendrá en secreto en cualquier reporte.

Sin embargo, si alguna información contenida en este estudio sea el objeto de una orden judicial o una citación legal, la Universidad de Denver quizá no pueda evitar el cumplimiento con la orden o citación. La información de la investigación podría ser compartida con agencias federales o comités locales quienes son responsables de proteger a los participantes de la investigación.

#### **Verificación a cargo de los miembros**

Se hará un seguimiento a lo largo de la escritura del reporte para asegurar que su opinión, experiencias e ideas se reflejan con exactitud. Si no está de acuerdo con que citas u otros resultados generados sean incluidos, aún de forma anónima, por favor infórmele a la investigadora.

#### **Preguntas**

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre este proyecto o su participación, por favor siéntase libre de hacer preguntas ahora o contactar a **Kayon Morgan** al número **303-910-7927 y/o por correo electrónico [kayon.morgan@du.edu](mailto:kayon.morgan@du.edu)** en cualquier momento.

#### **Opciones de Participación**

Por favor indique su elección para las opciones a continuación:

- ☐ La investigadora puede grabarme en audio durante este estudio.
- ☐ La investigadora puede grabarme en video durante este estudio.
- ☐ La investigadora puede fotografiarme durante este estudio.
- ☐ La investigadora NO puede grabarme en audio durante este estudio..
- ☐ La investigadora NO puede grabarme en video durante este estudio.
- ☐ La investigadora NO puede fotografiarme durante este estudio.

Por favor tome todo el tiempo que necesite para leer este documento y decidir si le gustaría participar en este estudio de investigación.

Si está de acuerdo en participar en este studio de investigación, por favor firme a continuación. Se le proporcionará una copia de este formulario para sus registros.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Firma del Participante**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Fecha**

## Appendix C: Interview Protocols

### Interview Guide and Protocol – Family/Caregiver

**Research Question:** What are the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in a suburban school district?

#### **Informed Consent Follow-up:**

Provide the Informed Consent Form to the participant and ask that the form be read. After the participant has read the form, ask the participant if he/she has any questions about his/her consent, the research, or the process. Answer any questions the participant may have, and ask the participant if he/she is willing to participate in the study and to sign the Informed Consent Form. If willing to participate, a copy of the form will be provided for his/her records.

#### **Introductory Protocol:**

*I would like to audio record our discussion today so that I can ensure the best accuracy in note taking for this study. For your information, please know that I will be the only one who will have access to the information from today's conversation, both for the audio recording and the notes I will be taking. Additionally, I will destroy the audio recording after the notes have been transcribed and the research project is completed. Because of these efforts to provide protections, the informed consent form signed by you today meets the requirements for human subject research. The form explains that: 1) All information shared during our conversation will be kept confidential; 2) Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may stop at any time without penalty if you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed; and 3) there is no harm intended through this study.*

*It is my plan that this interview should take no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to ask you. In order to respect your time commitment, I may need to interrupt our conversation if we are running short on time.*

#### **Introduction to the Research Project:**

*You have been selected to talk with me today because of your role as family for students in the school district. My research project looks at the perceptions that are held by various stakeholders in the school district regarding family engagement, but especially so in postsecondary and workforce readiness. This study is conducted as a case study approach which seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of these various perceptions. Your opinions, experiences, ideas, and participation are very important in this study and may lead to improved practices regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness. This will essentially lead to better outcomes for students as they explore their postsecondary options.*

*As a follow-up to this interview, I will ask for your comments and feedback during the writing of the report to ensure that your opinion, experiences, ideas are accurately reflected.*

*Do you have any questions before we begin?*

*First, please complete this card on demographic information. The data will be used purely for analysis. Completion of this card is optional.*

**Demographic Questions**

**1. What is your education level?**

- ☐ Completed some school prior to high school
- ☐ Completed some high school
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Completed some college
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Completed some postgraduate
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Ph.D., law or medical degree
- ☐ Other advanced degree beyond a Master's degree

**2. Which range best matches your age?**

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65-74
- ☐ 75 years or older

**3. What is your race/ethnicity?**

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin of Any Race
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Two or More Races

**4. What is your marital status?**

- ☐ Single (never married)
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Divorced

**5. What is your total household income (before taxes)?**

- ☐ Less than \$25,000
- ☐ \$25,000 - \$34,999
- ☐ \$35,000 – \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 – \$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000 - \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 - \$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 or more

**6. What is your relationship to the child/children?**

**7. Which school(s) does your child/children attend?**

Thank You

*Primero, complete esta ficha de información demográfica. Los datos serán usados solamente para análisis. La realización de esta ficha es opcional.*

### **Preguntas Demográficas**

**1. ¿Cuál es su nivel de educación?**

- ☐ Completé niveles de escolaridad antes de la educación media (secundaria)
- ☐ Completé niveles de educación media
- ☐ Graduado(a) de la secundaria
- ☐ Completé algunos niveles universitarios
- ☐ Título de asociado
- ☐ Título universitario
- ☐ Completé algunos niveles de postgrado
- ☐ Grado de maestría
- ☐ Ph.D., título de médico o en derecho
- ☐ Otros títulos avanzados más allá de uno de maestría

**2. ¿Qué rango mayor corresponde a tu edad?**

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65-74
- ☐ 75 años o mayor

**3. ¿Cuál es tu raza o etnicidad?**

- ☐ Indígena Americano o de Alaska
- ☐ Asiático
- ☐ Negro o Afroamericano
- ☐ Hispano, Latino u Origen Español de Cualquier Raza
- ☐ Nativo Hawaiano o Isleño del Pacífico
- ☐ Blanco
- ☐ Dos o más razas

**4. ¿Cuál es su estado civil?**

- ☐ Soltero (nunca casado)
- ☐ Casado

- ☐ Separado
- ☐ Viudo
- ☐ Divorciado

**5. ¿Cuál es su ingreso total familiar? (sin incluir impuestos)**

- ☐ Menos de \$25,000
- ☐ \$25,000 - \$34,999
- ☐ \$35,000 - \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 - \$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000 - \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 - \$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 o más

**6. ¿Cuál es su relación con el niño/niños?**

**7. ¿A cuál escuela asiste su niño/niños?**

*Gracias*

## Interview Questions - Family

*Now I will ask some questions regarding the study. You may ask me questions at any time during this process. If you would like to follow along, here is a copy of the questions I plan to ask.*

- 1) With which phrase are you more familiar, parent involvement or family engagement?
  - a. What does the phrase “parent involvement” mean to you?
  - b. What does the phrase family engagement mean to you?
- 2) In what ways have you seen or been a part of family engagement at the school or district?
  - a. How do you want family engagement to be different in the school or district?
- 3) What are your hopes and dreams for your child’s educational future?
  - a. Describe some ways that you are engaged with your child’s education at home?
  - b. Describe some of the ways that you are engaged with your child’s education at school?
  - c. What are some of the barriers that prevent you from being engaged?
- 4) How do you encourage and prepare your child to go to college?
- 5) What are the postsecondary and workforce readiness programs, interventions offered in the school/district of which you are aware?
  - a. How do you get information on these programs?
  - b. Do you receive communication in a language you understand?
  - c. What is the best way to communicate this information to you?
  - d. Do you receive feedback about your children and what specific feedback do you receive?
- 6) How do you encourage and prepare your child to be prepared for work/employment after high school?
- 7) What are some of the skills that you think are necessary for your child/children to be successful after high school – be it in college or work?
- 8) What role do you feel that teachers play in postsecondary and workforce readiness?
- 9) What role do you feel that principals play in postsecondary and workforce readiness?
- 10) What role do you feel that the district plays in postsecondary and workforce readiness?

### **Summarizing Question:**

- 11) Did you want to add anything further about your child’s education and future?
  - ✓ Summarize
  - ✓ Thank the participant
  - ✓ Provide extra information and contact

### Preliminary Interview Summary Form

Analysis of perceptions of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness.

Participant ID #: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview location: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview time: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Identify main patterns and themes that became apparent during the interview.
2. Environmental observations during interview

Question	Observation of Initial Themes and Patterns	Environmental observations	Initial thoughts, impressions, emotions

## Interview Guide and Protocol – School & District Personnel

**Research Question:** What are the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness in a suburban school district?

### **Informed Consent Follow-up:**

Provide the Informed Consent Form to the participant and ask that the form be read. After the participant has read the form, ask the participant if he/she has any questions about his/her consent, the research, or the process. Answer any questions the participant may have, and ask the participant if he/she is willing to participate in the study and to sign the Informed Consent Form. If willing to participate, a copy of the form will be provided for his/her records.

### **Introductory Protocol:**

*I would like to audio record our discussion today so that I can ensure the best accuracy in note taking for this study. For your information, please know that I will be the only one who will have access to the information from today's conversation, both for the audio recording and the notes I will be taking. Additionally, I will destroy the audio recording after the notes have been transcribed and the research project is completed. Because of these efforts to provide protections, the informed consent form signed by you today meets the requirements for research. The form explains that: 1) All information shared during our conversation will be kept confidential; 2) Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may stop at any time without penalty if you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed; and 3) there is no harm intended through this study.*

*It is my plan that this interview should take no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to ask you. In order to respect your time commitment, I may need to interrupt our conversation if we are running short on time.*

### **Introduction to the Research Project:**

*You have been selected to talk with me today because of your role as a \_\_\_\_\_ for students in the school district. My research project looks at the perceptions that are held by various stakeholders in the school district regarding family engagement, but especially so in postsecondary and workforce readiness. This study is conducted as a case study approach which seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of these various perceptions. Do you have any questions before we begin? Your opinions, experiences, ideas, and participation are very important in this study and may lead to improved practices regarding family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness. This will essentially lead to better outcomes for students as they explore their postsecondary options.*

*As a follow-up to this interview, I will ask for your comments and feedback during the writing of the report to ensure that your opinion, experiences, ideas are accurately reflected. Do you have any questions before we begin?*



*First, please complete this card on demographic information. The data will be used purely for analysis. Completion of this card is optional.*

**Demographic Questions**

**1. What is your education level?**

- ☐ Completed some school prior to high school
- ☐ Completed some high school
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Completed some college
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Completed some postgraduate
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Ph.D., law or medical degree
- ☐ Other advanced degree beyond a Master's degree

**2. Which range best matches your age?**

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65-74
- ☐ 75 years or older

**3. What is your race/ethnicity?**

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin of Any Race
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Two or More Races

**4. What is your role/position in the school or district?**

**5. How long have you been in your role?**

**6. How long have worked in education?**

**7. With which school are you affiliated?**

- ☐ N/A – I am a district office employee.

Thank You

## Interview Questions – School & District Personnel

*Now I will ask some questions regarding the study. You may ask me questions at any time during this process. If you would like to follow along, here is a copy of the questions I plan to ask.*

1. With which phrase are you more familiar, parent involvement or family engagement?
  - a. What does the phrase “parent involvement” mean to you?
  - b. What does the phrase family engagement mean to you?
2. In what ways have you seen or been a part of family engagement at the school or district?
  - a. How do you want family engagement to be different?
3. What are your hopes and dreams for the educational future of students in your class/school/district?
  - a. Describe some ways that you think family is engaged with their child’s education at home?
  - b. Describe some of the ways that you are engaged with students’ education at school?
  - c. What are some of the barriers that you think prevent families from being engaged?
4. How do you encourage and prepare students to go to college?
  - a. What are practices you have for developing aspirations about college?
5. What are the postsecondary and workforce readiness programs, interventions offered in the school/district of which you are aware?
  - a. How do you get information on these programs?
  - b. Do you communicate this information to families in a language they can understand?
6. How do you encourage and prepare your students to be prepared for work/employment after high school?
7. What are some of the skills that you think are necessary for your students to be successful after high school – be it in college or work?
8. What role do you feel that families play in postsecondary and workforce readiness?
9. What role do you feel that teachers play in postsecondary and workforce readiness?
10. What role do you feel that principals play in postsecondary and workforce readiness?
11. What role do you feel that the district plays in postsecondary and workforce readiness?

### **Summarizing Question:**

12. Did you want to add anything further about your child’s education and future?
  - ✓ Summarize
  - ✓ Thank the participant
  - ✓ Provide extra information and contact

### Preliminary Interview Summary Form

Analysis of perceptions of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness.

Participant ID #: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview location: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview time: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Identify main patterns and themes that became apparent during the interview.
2. Environmental observations during interview

Question	Observation of Initial Themes and Patterns	Environmental observations	Initial thoughts, impressions, emotions

## Appendix D: Tracking of Interviews

### Sample Tracking Sheet of Interviews with Participants

Stakeholder	Role	Date of email/contact	Additional Communication	Comments	Date of interview	Follow-up comments
	Preschool Director/Principal and Child Find Director	3/16/17			3/17/2017 @ 2:00 pm	interview completed
	Elementary Principal	3/23/17			4/4/2017 @ 8:00 am	interview completed
	HS Principal	3/2/17	N/A	N/A	3/9/2017 @ 9:30 pm	interview completed
	HS and MS Principal	3/2/17	Emailed secretary on 3/9/17		3/20/2017 @ 11:15 pm	interview completed
	ES Teacher	3/1/17			4/4/2017 @ 10:40 am	interview completed
	MS Teacher	3/20/17	3/25/17		4/10/2017 @ 11:10 am	
	HS Teacher	3/9/17		Recommended by Principal of CFHS	3/14/2017 @ 2:15 pm	interview completed
	Family Member ECE				4/3/2017 @ 8:30 am	interview completed
	Family Member ECE, Elementary & Middle				3/20/2017 @ 8:10 am	interview completed
			Family emailed me to be in study after receiving invitation via district's newsletter			
	Family Member HS	3/11/17			3/16/2017 @ 8:00 pm	interview completed
	Family Member HS	3/16/17			3/24/2017 @ 10:00 am	interview completed
	Family Member HS				4/4/2017 @ 4:00 pm	interview completed
	Family Member MS	3/15/17	Additional communication sent	no response received		This was a family member recommended from snowball sampling but individual has been unresponsive
	Family Member MS, HS, ECE	3/15/17			3/17/2017 @ 9:00 am	interview completed
	Family Member ECE, Elementary & Middle	3/16/17	trying to make a connection		4/5/2017 @ 6:00 pm	interview completed
	PWR Director	3/2/17	N/A	N/A	3/10/2017 @ 2:30 pm	interview completed
	Superintendent	3/7/17			3/17/2017 @ 10:30 pm	interview completed

## Appendix E: Sample of Preliminary Interview Summary Form

Analysis of perceptions of family engagement in postsecondary and workforce readiness.

Participant ID #: \_Family#4\_      Today's Date: \_\_3/29/2017\_\_\_\_\_

Interview Number: \_\_\_\_#8\_\_\_\_\_      Interview Date: \_\_3/28/2017\_\_\_\_\_

Interview location: Panera Bread      Interview time: \_\_8:15pm – 9:10am\_\_\_\_\_

1. Identify main patterns and themes that became apparent during the interview.
2. Environmental observations during interview

Question	Observation of Initial Themes and Patterns	Environmental observations	Initial thoughts, impressions, emotions
1	Family engagement and parent involvement were familiar to this family member. Perhaps because she is in education.	The environment was calm. The family member was immediately chatty and seemed at ease and ready to engage in conversation. We did a preliminary conversation.	There was sense of pride as this family member talked about her engagement. This seemed to be even more so as her children are in high school and a graduate of high school. To be engaged all the way through was important to her.
2	Family engagement at home is important. Provides resources for her children. If lacking, she seeks them out.		There was emphasis on what happens at home. However, does wish for family engagement to be different in the schools. Wants more opportunities to be engaged at school.
3	All things lead up to the preparation of college		
4			

5	Lack of knowledge Communication	Seemed reluctant to accept the term postsecondary and workforce readiness from her body language. Seemed upset that information is not communicated consistently and on a regular basis.	PWR comes across as less than. She felt that her children were better than that and she did not want her children settling for less. She had high standards and expectations. Had a difficult time accepting that both her children may not be cut out for college. It may be a hard sell for the district for PWR to come across as all options.
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## Appendix F: Sample Pages from Passport Used for Opportunity Fair

## INSTRUCTIONS

Choose one question (can be your own question or from the sample questions listed here) to ask at each table. After you ask your question, the host at the table will give you a stamp for your passport, and you can write notes about what you learned on that page.

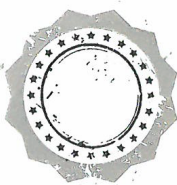
### List of Sample Questions:

- What career field does this opportunity relate to? And how would this summer opportunity help me get into this field?
- What got you started/interested in working here?
- Does this summer opportunity lead to options for further employment with your organization?
- How would this opportunity help me become more connected with my community?
- Why might future employers like to see this on my resume?
- How might this opportunity help me get into college?
- What do you think is the best thing about this opportunity?
- My summer goal is \_\_\_\_\_. How do you think this relates to my summer goal?

STUDENT NAME:

**FAMILY NAME:**

TEACHER INITIAL:

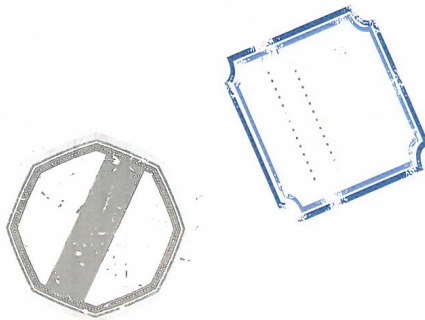
[illegible]

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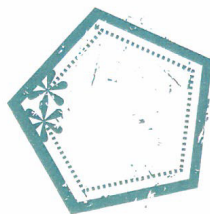
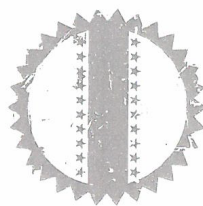
[illegible]

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[illegible]

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[illegible]

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## Appendix G: Approvals to Adapt Frameworks

### Permission to Adapt the Framework of Six Types of Involvement

**From:** Joyce Epstein <jepstein@jhu.edu>

**Date:** Monday, April 17, 2017 at 2:58 PM

**To:** Kayon Morgan <Kayon.Morgan@du.edu>

**Subject:** RE: Permission to Adapt the Framework of Six Types of Involvement

4-17-17

To: Kayon Morgan

From: Joyce Epstein

Re: Permission Granted

Thank you for your note and kind words. I am glad to know of your interest in research on school, family, and community partnerships.

This is to grant you permission to use and adapt my Framework of Six Types of Involvement to enable you to address your research questions on family engagement for postsecondary and workforce readiness.

All that we require is that you provide full reference to the original work in your reports and publications.

Best of luck with your study.

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D.  
Director, Center on School, Family, and  
Community Partnerships and  
National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)  
Research Professor of Education and Sociology  
2701 North Charles Street, Suite 300  
Baltimore, MD 21218

Phone: (410) 516-8807

Fax: (410) 516-8890

Email: [jepstein@jhu.edu](mailto:jepstein@jhu.edu)

Web: [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org)

## Permission to adapt Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

**From:** "O'Brien, Kim" <kobrien@air.org>  
**Date:** Friday, April 7, 2017 at 8:33 AM  
**To:** Kayon Morgan <Kayon.Morgan@du.edu>  
**Cc:** "Garwood, Jane" <jgarwood@air.org>, "Sacco, Helen" <hsacco@air.org>, "Kilpatrick, Dona" <DKilpatrick@air.org>, Copyright Help Desk–Prof Svcs <copyright\_PS@air.org>  
**Subject:** RE: Permission to adapt Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

Hi, Kayon,

Thank you for your copyright permission request.

American Institutes (AIR) is unable to grant permissions to use the SEDL Dual-Capacity Building Framework because the U.S. Department of Education owns the copyright to this publication. Typically, AIR is able to grant permissions to use works that we developed for the Department of Education, and you clearly intend to use this publication for scholarly purposes; however, the copyright terms and conditions for this particular work are such that we do not have the authority to act on permissions requests.

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Best,  
Kim

Kim O'Brien  
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## Permission to adapt Model of the Parental Involvement Process

**From:** "Hoover-Dempsey, Kathleen V" <kathy.hoover-dempsey@Vanderbilt.Edu>  
**Date:** Friday, June 2, 2017 at 9:13 PM  
**To:** Kayon Morgan <Kayon.Morgan@du.edu>  
**Cc:** "Hoover-Dempsey, Kathleen V" <kathy.hoover-dempsey@Vanderbilt.Edu>  
**Subject:** RE: Permission to Adapt the Model of the Parental Involvement Process

Dear Kayon,

Many thanks for your kind note below, and my many apologies for not responding to your earlier requests. I retired after 40 years at Vanderbilt University in August of 2013, and have not been as constantly on-line as was the case before retirement . . . and just found your emails this evening.

Your study sounds very interesting, and I thank you for using our model of the parental involvement process in your research and for sharing the very helpful short overview of your study. I'm very happy to give you permission to adapt the concepts in our model to fit the focus of your investigation. (My last doctoral students and I also shifted from 'parental involvement' to 'family engagement' in the last years of our work :)) ).

I wish you the very best in your June 15th dissertation defense, and in your career to come, and I offer special thanks to you for your kindness in trying yet again to contact me. I wish you all the best in your on-going career, and may you enjoy it thoroughly!

Sincerely,

Kathy Hoover-Dempsey, Ph.D, Professor Emerita  
Psychology & Human Development  
Peabody College of Vanderbilt University  
Nashville, TN 37203